Commentary
November 1997

What Good Is Government?
William J. Bennett & John J. DiIulio, Jr.

Yiddish: Past, Present, Imperfect
Ruth R. Wisse

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The Stain on Vanessa Stephen's Dress
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In and Out at the "New Republic"
Midge Decter

Books in Review

David Pryce-Jones • Christopher Caldwell • Algis Valiunas
Chester E. Finn, Jr. • David Ostwald

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Commentary®

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Commentary
November 1997

Letters from Readers

Allen Ginsberg

To the Editor:

As Norman Podhoretz's "My War With Allen Ginsberg" [August] proves, there is no war like an old war. I wish Mr. Podhoretz would take the time to look back and decide that his conflict with Ginsberg was not an essential moment in American literary history. In fact, according to his own lights, I believe Mr. Podhoretz might find several reasons to praise Ginsberg.

First of all, as the poet Louis Simpson demonstrated in *A Revolution in Taste*, Ginsberg essentially *was* a poet, not a propagandist or a libertine. He always thought in terms of literary creation and its relation to spirituality. Contrary to Mr. Podhoretz's assertion that Ginsberg was a spent literary force by 1959, the poet was able to conjure up lyrical writing at all stages of his career. You may not always have liked what Ginsberg was doing, but you had to grant him the craft to know how to do it.

Second, I feel Mr. Podhoretz stumbles badly on the issue of pornography in Ginsberg's poems. Pornography is obscene by virtue of its ability to wound through senseless violence. Allen Ginsberg is not a pornographic poet. Even his valedictory poem in the *New Yorker* is touchingly egocentric and loving in its *réminiscences d'amour*. If Mr. Podhoretz's implicit case for obscenity lies in rampant homoeroticism, why doesn't he just say so?

Third, Mr. Podhoretz badly mangles the important role Ginsberg's writings play in the American discussion and treatment of the mad. As a manic-depressive with an uncle who had undergone a lobotomy—and who was a state-hospital contemporary of Ginsberg's mother—I have learned firsthand that Ginsberg grew up in a time when mental illness was a shameful attribute. When Ginsberg chose to "beatify" the mad, he called attention to a whole social substructure that oppressed and tortured some of the most helpless among us. Mr. Podhoretz wants all literature somehow to convey a fulfilling vision within a normative life. Ginsberg had the courage to say, "it ain't necessarily so."

As a poet myself, I still have to face the intransigence of all but a few editors when I write, in the most clinical way, about hospital wards and the terrors of psychosis. That I, and other writers like me, can be published at all and embraced by public audiences is a tribute to Allen Ginsberg's humanity and daring. He was right about self-promotion: even if he was wrong about Kerouac, drugs, the Gulf war, and anything else one might express an opinion on over seven decades, he forced Mr. Podhoretz, John Hollander, Donald Hall, and others to take his world seriously by the very fact of who he was. The first obligation of a master poet is not always to be likable.

David Saemann
Wayne, New Jersey

To the Editor:

Is Norman Podhoretz implying that not only Allen Ginsberg's life but his poetry constituted a "revolt" against "normal feeling and the attempt to cope with the world through intelligence"? Is poetry to be judged on the basis of what it tells us about the poet's life as well as on its artistic vision? Is significant art—or, for that matter, second- or third-drawer art—to be read, seen, or heard as polemical or political fodder, to the detriment of the imaginative and stylistic integrity of each piece?

Mr. Podhoretz's aversion to the Beat ethos and to the ways of life that followed it up until the present day appears to be influencing an appreciation of Ginsberg's poetry. Whether or not the

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poetry will achieve classic status (time alone will see to that), it is, I believe, a disservice to the poet to encumber the art with the particulars of the artist's life.

If an artist's work were to be associated with the unpleasant detritus of his personal life, how many of us would wish to know the plays of Tennessee Williams, the operas of Richard Wagner, or the paintings of Vincent Van Gogh?

ROBERT LAGERSTROM
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

The picture Norman Podhoretz paints of Allen Ginsberg effectively illustrates Ginsberg's anti-Americanism and libertinism, but when he expands the portrait to include the entire counterculture, Mr. Podhoretz puts down his fine brush and picks up a crude spray-paint gun:

> [Ginsberg's] disciples and friends now extended way beyond the relatively narrow circle of the Beats to encompass the entire world of the counterculture, from rock musicians like Bob Dylan to hippies and "yippies" like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin to a variety of "gurus" peddling one form or another of Oriental mysticism. What they all had in common was a fierce hatred of America, which they saw as "Amerika," a country morally and spiritually equivalent to Nazi Germany. Its political system was based on oppression, to which the only answer was resistance and revolution, and its culture was based on repression, to which the only answer was to opt out of middle-class life and liberate the squelched and smothered self through drugs and sexual (preferably homosexual) promiscuity.

I would be interested to have Mr. Podhoretz cite the songs in which Bob Dylan advocates homosexuality as the preferred form of promiscuity to liberate American culture. As for the Oriental mystics, I can attest that for at least one of Ginsberg's guru friends, Mr. Podhoretz's indictment is false.

In the fall of 1966, posters appeared around Manhattan showing the head of an Indian man with sparkling eyes, long hair, and a beard of Santa Claus proportions. The poster bore the caption: "On December 2, 1,000 people will be able to hear Swami Satchidananda. Allen Ginsberg will introduce him, chant mantras, and recite poetry." At the time I was a college dropout living in New York and newly interested in yoga as a spiritual path. I had read some of Ginsberg's poetry and admired it. So, with several hundred others, I attended the event, held at a midtown church.

The occasion unfolded as advertised. Ginsberg chanted for a considerable time, read poetry, some of it anti-American, and introduced Swami Satchidananda as one who could serve as a guide to American youth searching for spiritual truth.

Attracted by Satchidananda's message and personality, I became a student at the Swami's Integral Yoga Institute in New York, where Ginsberg was an occasional visitor. Before long, I was a full-time disciple of the Swami's and planned to become a Swami myself. For two years I attended many of his public talks and was present during innumerable private conversations. In all my association with Satchidananda, I never observed him to express anti-American sentiments. He was apolitical and his message, whatever its inadequacies (they were such that I broke with him after two years), was a spiritual one. And far from promoting drugs and promiscuity, Satchidananda preached against drugs (and persuaded many young people to give them up) and in favor of celibacy.

In his article, Mr. Podhoretz quotes from one of his early critiques: "Being against what the Beat generation stands for has to do with denying that incoherence is superior to precision." I submit that his animus against Allen Ginsberg and the counterculture has led Mr. Podhoretz to fail his own standard of precision.

DANIEL LOVE GLAZER
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

I am in total agreement with what Norman Podhoretz has to say about Allen Ginsberg and his friends. I believe that Ginsberg is one of the spiritual ancestors of reactionary anti-Americans like Timothy McVeigh.

Ginsberg's death reminds us how anti-reason and anti-science the 1960's and early 1970's were. The growth of Buddhism in a country with no Buddhist tradition, the interest in astrology, the spirituality of that era—all emerged in precisely the place where one would least expect it: the colleges. The secular tradition of American constitutional government was confronted with a new enthusiasm for mysticism and irrationality. The counterculture was relatively weak, but it was working from within; it challenged the idea of evidence based on the senses and on scientific testing.

The counterculture would have fizzled out, but it was joined by religious zealots who had never been content with the conservatism of American religion. They created a new anti-democratic force that put the Left to shame.

GEORGE JOCHNOWITZ
CUNY-Staten Island
Staten Island, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to thank Norman Podhoretz for his article on Allen Ginsberg. Recently the leading Russian daily in New York, *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, published a poem by the well-known Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky on the death of Ginsberg. The last two lines of this poem (in my prosaic translation) read: "A Holy Angel looks down from the sky/ This angel is Ginsberg." What an interesting angel indeed.

I immigrated to the U.S. from the Soviet Union in 1989 and am currently a professor of mathematics at the University of Pittsburgh, but I am also a poet and political analyst. I replied to Voznesensky in an article and poem (also in the Russian press) and am amazed to see how close my points were to those of Mr. Podhoretz, although I was driven mostly by intuition while he, of course, has firsthand knowledge. In my view, we are dealing here with a major pollutant of the intellectual and moral environment.

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I would also like to comment on the footnote in which Mr. Podhoretz says he had always thought that

> Communist governments were stupid in failing to understand that cultural radicals like Ginsberg who did everything in their power to undermine American resistance to Communism were their de-facto allies in the cold war.

I think he underestimates the KGB. It is true that Communist governments would never tolerate Ginsberg-type activities in their own territories, but they were pleased to see such pseudo-prophets at work destroying the West. And the KGB not only observed such people, it used them for its own ends. It was, in fact, people like Ginsberg and other so-called Western "intellectuals" whom Lenin had in mind when he used the phrase "useful idiots," that is, useful allies in promoting the Communist cause.

BORIS A. KUSHNER
Johnstown, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

Allen Ginsberg's 60's performances in London have stuck in my memory. Coming away from one of them, I found myself agreeing with the critic who remarked that "Howl" should be retitled "Bleat."

Two aspects of Ginsberg and his "movement" impressed me at the time. One was that his appeal to gross animal instinct and emotions had a lot in common with certain aspects of Nazism. The other was how much he (unwittingly) evoked Hannah Arendt's description (in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) of that good old *nostalgie de la boue* in chic European haut-bourgeois circles. It seemed to me that there was always something pathetically, quintessentially middle-class, even suburban, in Ginsberg's revolt, and among his followers: the famous Marxian phenomenon of history being repeated (or played out by high-school kids who never grew up) as farce.

Of course, I did not have Norman Podhoretz's advantage of personal acquaintance with the man. Still, I never understood why so many Americans—not all of them young—took him so seriously. He had talent, but it was not a big talent, and certainly not great—except maybe for public relations.

Even so, it was fascinating to read Norman Podhoretz's account.

HERB GREER
Manchester, England

TO THE EDITOR:

I read Norman Podhoretz's "My War With Allen Ginsberg" with great care. Then I reread it, put it down, and read it yet again a week later.

I come out of that time of the late 1950's (born in 1943), and I had, I must say, a benign view of much of what was going on then. Norman Podhoretz made me think, and think hard. For this, I thank him.

ROGER SODER
Seattle, Washington

TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz's piece on Allen Ginsberg was of a high order of truth-telling and intellectual vigor. In saner times, I would expect it to be the first choice of the 1997 edition of *Best American Essays*, but I am sure Mr. Podhoretz can live with the certainty that his work is among the best of our time.

MARK SCHORE
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz's elaborate soliloquy about his acrimonious lifelong relationship with America's anarchist bard, the late Allen Ginsberg, reminded me of two related incidents. The first was a long conversation a colleague, Avraham Shemtov, and I had with Ginsberg in the early spring of 1994. Steering from subject to subject, we began discussing contemporary literary figures and their political tendencies. In a test of Ginsberg's Buddhist equability, Avraham began speaking about Mr. Podhoretz in a laudatory manner. ("I just wanted to see how he would react," Avraham later confessed to me.)

Ginsberg's nonchalance suddenly evaporated as he went off on a tirade for several minutes, calling Mr. Podhoretz everything from "a wannabe without any [literary] talent—and he knows it," to "a McCarthyite who wants to control everything" by "putting his own family, his own son-in-law, into the government to run our lives and suppress all of America into a totalitarian state." (He was to repeat this last allegation with great flair a few days later during his class on Beat literature at Brooklyn College.) As far as I can remember, words such as "megalomaniac," "hateful," "bitter," and "frustrated" were liberally scattered throughout. Only Cynthia Ozick was held in more contempt for her "neofascist" attitude toward the Palestinians.

The second incident took place two months later. During a late-night gathering of young Lubavitchers, students, and aspiring poets at Ginsberg's former apartment on East 12th Street, someone pulled a copy of Mr. Podhoretz's *Making It* from a shelf, opened it where the jacket flap had it bookmarked, and began reading. Seeing this, Ginsberg snuck up behind the reader and glanced at the open page. Raising his eyes, he smiled ruefully at me, and in an I-told-you-so manner, gestured toward the book and gleefully walked away.

Taking the signal, I went over to see what the passage was. The book was opened to page 39 and there I read:

> [My] hunger for success as a student . . . became absolutely uncontrollable when I began to realize that I would never make the grade as a poet. I had a small talent for verse, yet try as I did for more than two years, there was no concealing the fact from myself that, as compared with Allen Ginsberg, John Hollander, and a dozen other Columbia poets of the time, I rated at the most generous estimate a grudging honorable mention. . . . The truth was I could not bear the idea of not being great.

BARUCH B. THALER
Columbia University
Jewish Theological Seminary
New York City

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

David Saemann thinks that Allen Ginsberg wrote good poetry "at all stages of his career." I disagree, and I believe that careful critical analysis would bear out my contention that after 1959 the poet in him surrendered to the propagan-

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dist (who, to be sure, had been there before but in a less prominent role). I also disagree with Mr. Saemann's definition of pornography, but definitions aside, if the highly explicit descriptions of sexual activity in some of Ginsberg's later poems are not pornographic, then nothing is. On the question of madness, I have no quarrel whatever with writing "in the most clinical way" about psychosis; what I object to is representing it *à la* Ginsberg (and such theorists as R.D. Laing) as the true sanity and as a superior state of human consciousness.

On a related point raised by Robert Lagerstrom, when I spoke of the Beat ethos as a revolt against normal feeling and intelligence, I was talking about the poems and novels of Ginsberg, Kerouac, and their acolytes, not about their personal lives. The problem is that in the case of these writers, it is very difficult to distinguish between the life and the art: not for them the distinction T.S. Eliot drew between "the man who suffers and the mind which creates" or his conception of poetry as "an escape from personality" rather than "an expression of personality."

I will give Bob Dylan to Daniel Love Glazer if he will give me the acknowledgment that, whether or not one Oriental guru or another preached anti-Americanism in the 60's, it was a hatred of their own country and its culture that drew their young American followers to so alien a form of spirituality.

George Jochnowitz sees this clearly, and goes on to suggest a spiritual connection between Ginsberg and "reactionary anti-Americans like Timothy McVeigh." This seems a bit of a stretch to me, but on the other hand I have no doubt that a line can be drawn from the counterculture of the 60's to Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber.

I thank Boris A. Kushner, Herb Greer, Roger Soder, and Mark Schore for their kind words and interesting comments. I am also grateful to Baruch B. Thaler for the story he tells. I was, frankly, a little surprised to learn that as late as 1994 the mention of my name could still break down Ginsberg's "Buddhist equability," sending him first into a rage and then back yet again to my adolescent dreams of greatness in his never-ending and comically desperate effort to explain my relatively low opinion of his work. After all, as I wrote in my article, by 1994 Ginsberg had by his own account long since changed his mind about me, and he would reaffirm his newfound fondness in 1996, two years after the incidents described by Mr. Thaler and only six months before his death. But perhaps, like his beloved Whitman, he would have said, "Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes)." Then again—considering that it was, as he himself put it, while "dropping some Ecstasy" that he first decided to stop hating me—maybe his attitude varied with whatever drug he happened to be on at any given moment.

Democracy

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert Kagan ["Democracies and Double Standards," August] is dismayed that there is "a new distaste for promoting democracy abroad." He sides with almost all who write about it these days in assuming that democracy is like pregnancy: either you are democratic or you are not, with no middle ground. Democracy is assumed to have an opposite pole, dictatorship.

In his article, Mr. Kagan cites Samuel P. Huntington as discerning these "hallmarks" of democracy: "the separation of spiritual and temporal authority, pluralism, the rule of law, representative government, and respect for individual rights

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and liberties." If this is what Mr. Kagan means by democracy, he might instead have called it constitutional government.

Mr. Kagan admires the Clinton administration for its use of military force to restore a "democratically elected president in Haiti." What he means by democracy, this suggests, is a system of government defined by elections and the replacement of leaders by majority vote. But to think of government in this way is to reduce all the complexities of political architecture to a single procedure, one that does not explain the historical advance of those countries (mostly West European) now labeled democratic. It does not account for the lead they gained over the rest of the world in the 18th century. Elections came late. And back in the days when Britain was "Great" and "Britannia Ruled the Waves," the franchise was highly restricted.

By the time Europe reached the universal franchise, which is to say after World War I, all the other elements of constitutional government were in place: in particular, the complex machinery of law. This machinery cannot be replicated today by the mere repetition of the phrase "rule of law." And it is, to say the least, inadequate to represent all these antecedent developments with the one word "democracy," implying that if only the final capstone, the universal franchise, were put in place everywhere from Albania to Zambia, we might expect that all the other steps that historically preceded it would appear in due course.

The framers of the U.S. Constitution knew that good government was not adequately described by voting. Nor does voting preempt dictatorship. From Azerbaijan to Benin, from Serbia to Sudan, tyrants have learned how to get themselves elected. It is true that power must be divided and the arbitrary will of the sovereign or president must be checked by a popularly elected chamber. But the claim that this requires universal voting is modern and suspect.

What we now have in the U.S. may be called metastasized democracy. It is also the form that we unthinkingly advocate. The whole idea of qualifications for voting has been discredited by modern-day progressives, which may help explain why democracy is widely seen as a perilous exercise. Perhaps we should recall the shared linguistic root of *democrat* and *demagogue*. When democracy is implemented these days, it is always in the extreme form in which we (and Western Europe) now practice it. Is it not the beginning of wisdom to see that the way to start out, as we did, is with democracy of a more restrictive variety?

The problem with our own extreme version is that it gives free rein to the redistributive impulse without first establishing the necessary incentives to produce the goods. It tries to divide the pie before there is a pie to divide. The metastasized democracies in Europe and the U.S. have shown themselves incapable of reining in government spending, for the simple reason that recipient groups have sufficient voting power to ensure that benefits are never reduced.

I would be more willing to join in Mr. Kagan's lament for democracy if he had argued that it is possible to be a little bit democratic, and that, perhaps, a little is better than going all the way.

TOM BETHELL
American Spectator
Washington, D.C.

ROBERT KAGAN writes:

I thank Tom Bethell for his letter. I fully agree with him that true democracy must be more than elections, but it certainly cannot be less. If Mr. Bethell is arguing that we should not be pressing for elections in some countries because they have not passed through the same centuries-long evolution as the democracies of the West, he is repeating the argument of Jeane Kirkpatrick and others that I addressed in my article. I note again here that the good sense of this argument is challenged by the fact that in the past twenty years successful and evidently stable democracies have sprung up in places where neither history and culture nor economic conditions would seem to provide fertile ground in which democracy could take root.

But why argue about whether other countries are ready for democracy if we do not even like our own democracy? I noted in my article that many conservatives have soured on the idea of supporting democratic governance abroad in large part because they have soured on democracy at home in Bill Clinton's America. If I am reading him correctly, Mr. Bethell provides more evidence that I was right.

The Wall of Separation

TO THE EDITOR:

In his provocative article, "What Adams Saw Over Jefferson's Wall" [August], Richard A. Samuelson argues that John Adams was right in contending that religious opinion would, and should, play an important role in public debate. Of course it should—and surely it does.

There are more than 1,800 radio and TV stations nationwide, with an audience of tens of millions, whose chief reason for being is to espouse fundamentalist Christian doctrine on a variety of subjects. Currently, there is robust debate on a host of religious-moral issues, such as abortion, gay rights, school prayer, and teaching "creation science" in public schools. But that is not enough for many religious fundamentalists. What they really want is the freedom not just to preach and practice their own religious beliefs, but rather to impose these beliefs on the entire body politic, using government as the engine to achieve their goals. In other words, they seek to make unlawful what they deem to be sinful. The abortion issue is a striking example of this. In short, at least many, if not most, of them want a Christian theocracy, with all our laws firmly rooted in their interpretation of biblical precepts. Surely John Adams would never have gone along with this.

Mr. Samuelson writes that our founding fathers were not all of a single mind on the issue of church-state relations. This is certainly true, but it is also true that they were heavily in favor

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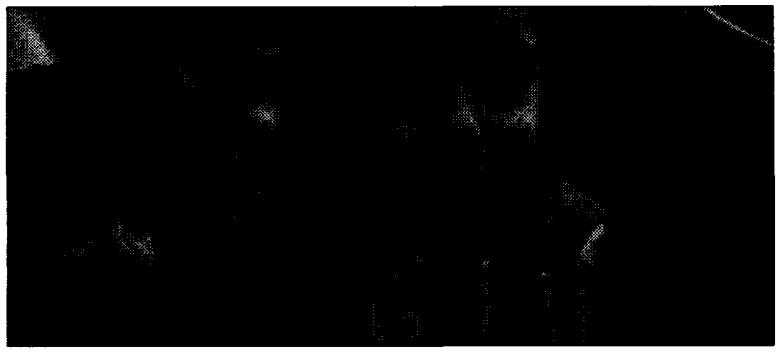

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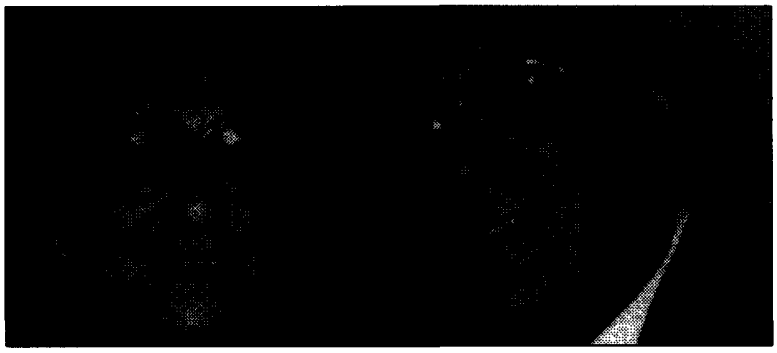

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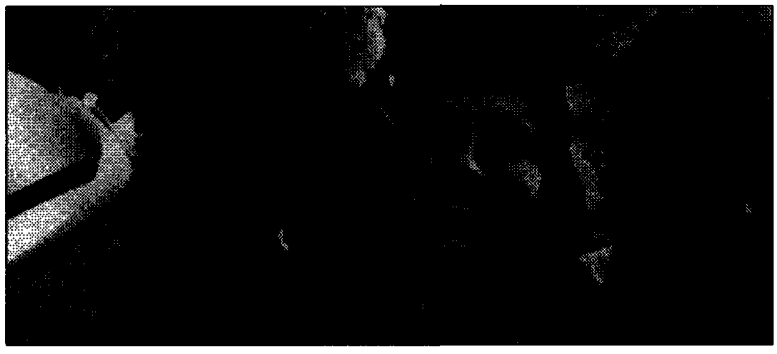

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of disestablishment. In fact, they designed a Constitution that contained no mention whatsoever of Jesus or, for that matter, even of God. They crafted a design for a secular republic, with religious liberty and freedom of conscience for all. Clearly, they intended to separate religion from government. As John Adams put it in the early days of the Continental Congress: "Congress [it is hoped] will never meddle with religion further than to say [its] own prayers, and to fast and to give thanks once a year."

But nothing in the Constitution says that religions cannot play a vital role in American public life, and they certainly should play such a role: an active, vibrant, constructive, noncoercive role on behalf of humane values.

SAMUEL RABINOVE
White Plains, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

The wall of separation between church and state envisioned by Thomas Jefferson and strengthened in our own century is indeed "a means of favoring certain values at the expense of others," as Richard A. Samuelson asserts, but among the favored values is precisely what Mr. Samuelson seems to want: a political system that "would seek to accommodate eternal conflicts, rather than, once and for all, win them."

What Mr. Samuelson must mean, therefore, is that Jefferson's wall does not allow "religious opinion . . . [to] play an important role in public debate." But such a claim is also difficult to understand in view of the fact that religious principles have constantly been invoked in the public debates over slavery and racial segregation in the past, and over birth control, abortion, divorce, capital punishment, and welfare reform in recent years.

The only way to understand Mr. Samuelson's complaint is to see it as echoing the claim of religious conservatives that on some issues religion should play not only an important role in public debate but a *decisive* one. The justification for this claim is that some laws decided by a majority vote are such clear violations of the laws of God that they cannot be obeyed by the truly religious. Such a claim is, obviously, an attack not only on our wall of separation between religion and politics but on our democratic ethos, the very basis of our political system. For a government that derives its authority from the consent of the governed cannot also be a government that gives any one religious institution, or even any combination of institutions, a veto power over the decisions of the majority.

LAWRENCE HYMAN
Ridgewood, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

When will people stop desecrating the good name of Thomas Jefferson in order to bolster their pet arguments? First it was Fawn Brodie and her "psychobiography" foolishness, giving unwarranted credence to old slanders about Jefferson and Sally Hemings. Then we had Bill Clinton's Inaugural fantasy, in which he dragooned Jefferson into the service of the very kind of activist federal government Jefferson steadfastly opposed. Next, it was Conor Cruise O'Brien, painting Jefferson as an inspiration for violent white extremists *à la* Timothy McVeigh. Now comes Richard A. Samuelson to portray Jefferson as an anti-Semite and anti-religious bigot. What next?

The simple fact is that Jefferson was a man whose views were formed in a particular time and place. He wrote candidly and prolifically about a wide range of subjects—astronomy to zoology—over the course of a long and eventful life. His views on some subjects changed somewhat over the years and, by choosing from among his many different public and private writings, one can easily construct an argument between Jefferson and Jefferson.

As for his views on religion, Jefferson was in general a freethinker, a man who approached religious belief with the same worldly, scientific perspective he brought to most other subjects. Above all, he prided himself on being entirely rational, and so we find that he was skeptical of miraculous and mystical elements in the Bible. This was not uncommon then, nor has it been uncommon since.

One cannot understand Jefferson's views on disestablishment without knowing something about the crucible in which they were formed. During the colonial era, the Church of England had a preferred position in Virginia, and its clergy was virtually a royal bureaucracy. As a result of their official status, Episcopal clergymen were not dependent on voluntary offerings. This meant that many neglected their congregations or lived riotously. Such scandals put the church in disrepute and led to a decline in genuine Christian belief.

After the Revolution, the question of disestablishment became a battleground, with that masterly orator, Patrick Henry, in favor of a general subsidy to the clergy, while Jefferson and James Madison arrayed themselves on the side of disestablishment. (Funny how no one ever bothers to disparage Madison.) Eventually, disestablishment won the day in Virginia, and Jefferson was proud of his role in the victory, making the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom one of three accomplishments listed on his tombstone.

Attempts by America's cultural elites to purge religion from schools and other institutions are indeed injurious to our nation. While citizens have every right to a government that reflects their religious beliefs, however, we must be careful that we do not allow government to begin meddling in matters of personal faith. This is a fine line, and such matters are best handled at the local level. In the meantime, I hope that writers will cease this annoying modern habit of dragging Jefferson's name through the mud for the sake of winning an argument. If we Southern conservatives can forgive Jefferson his excessive egalitarian zeal, surely the rest of the country can forgive his other pecadilloes.

ROBERT STACY MCCAIN
Rome, Georgia

TO THE EDITOR:

Richard A. Samuelson cites several letters of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams to illustrate the broad disagreement between "the intellectual children of the Enlightenment and the forces of conventional religion" that began

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in the aftermath of the Revolution and has continued to this day.

For the most part, Mr. Samuelson correctly interprets the differences between Adams and Jefferson as revealed in their correspondence. But he is wrong to equate Jefferson's private misgivings about orthodox religion with modern liberalism's dogmatic insistence on a radical degree of church-state separation.

To understand the political theory of the founding, one must first distinguish between the private thoughts of individual founders and the public expressions of those founders in their official capacities. Jefferson rejected orthodox religion in his letters, but not in his public speeches, which were full of praise for religion. In this he agreed with Adams, and indeed with the consensus of the founding era, which is summed up in the Northwest Ordinance:

> Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary for good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.

In other words, government would not only not forbid but would encourage religion in public schools.

In some areas one must distinguish between Jefferson on the one hand and the founding consensus on the other. The most famous example of this is the difference between Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence, which contained only one reference to God ("the laws of nature and of nature's God"), and Congress's additions, which added Creator, Providence, and Supreme Judge.

But one must also note that Jefferson's more extreme pronouncements on the religious question were often contradicted by his own writings and public pronouncements. While in public office, he frequently used religious language in his official capacity. For example, he ended both his Inaugural Addresses with a prayer. He even ended the famous "wall-of-separation" letter with a prayer.

The real gap is not between Jefferson and Adams, but between the founders—Jefferson and Adams included—on the one hand and modern liberalism on the other. Today's liberals want to banish religion from the public square altogether, and would have rejected the public practice and pronouncements of both Adams and Jefferson.

THOMAS G. WEST
Claremont Institute
Claremont, California

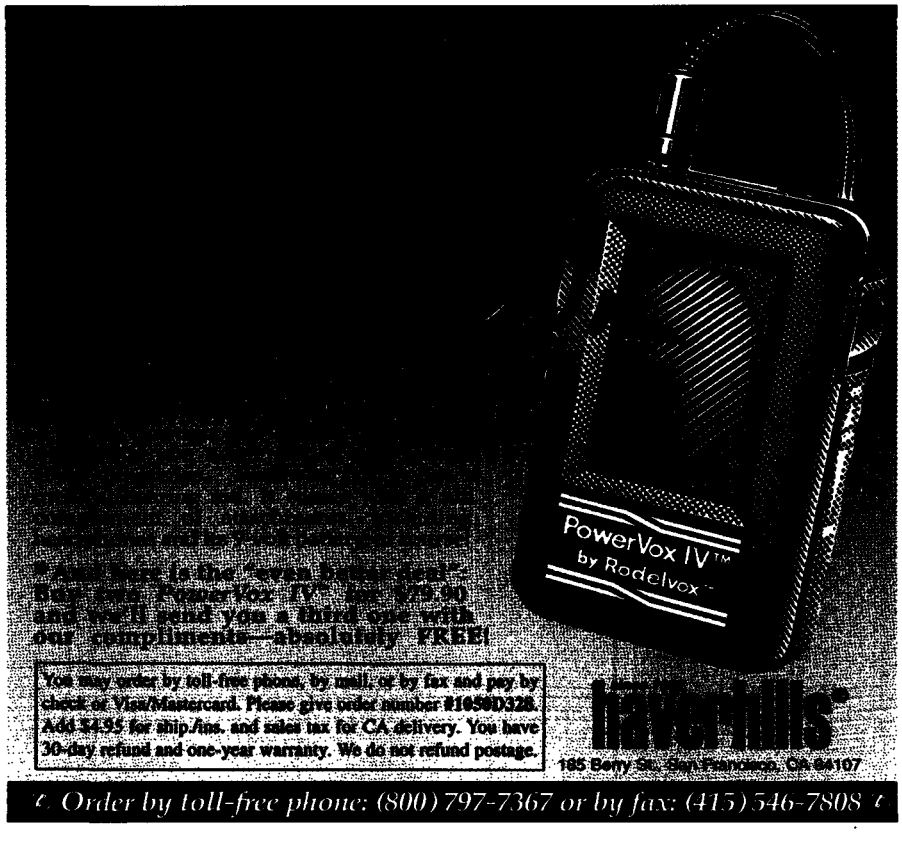
TO THE EDITOR:

Richard A. Samuelson particularly maligns Thomas Jefferson as an aggressive proponent of a godless state, an atheist who "never uttered a word in prayer," and a "virulent" anti-Judaizer. None of these accusations is true.

While Jefferson did believe the First Amendment erected a "wall of separation between church and state," this barrier is far less formidable than is generally recognized. As he explained in his letter to Reverend Samuel Miller, the "wall of separation" was intended only "to prohibit state direction of religious exercises." It was not, however, to be understood, Jefferson later wrote (October 7, 1822), "that instruction in religious opinion and duties was meant to be precluded by the public authorities, as indifferent to the interests of society."

Moreover, under Jefferson's administration, and with his frequent participation, the House of Representatives was authorized to use its hall for weekly religious services. So much for Mr. Samuelson's claim that the adult Jefferson "never uttered a word of prayer."

As for the charge that Jefferson was a bigot, a careful examination of his writings demonstrates that he did not object to Judaism or Christianity as such, but to any form of religion that burdened its disciples with what he perceived to be un-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necessary dogmas and ceremonies. If he criticized Judaism for erring in this manner, he did the same of Catholicism.

The views Mr. Samuelson attributes to Jefferson are not Jefferson's but those of the Supreme Court, which, since the 1947 *Everson* ruling, has consistently favored secularism over religious belief. Victory over such heresy will not be won by blaming and abandoning the principles of our founding, but by returning to them.

JAMESON T. TAYLOR
University of Dallas
Dallas, Texas

TO THE EDITOR:

Richard A. Samuelson's article is excellent, but he is wrong on one point. He says that "the wall of separation has indeed become what Jefferson intended it to be—a means of favoring a certain set of values at the expense of others." Jefferson intended no such thing.

It is true that Jefferson, like Adams, was a disestablishmentarian. He was as distrustful of the sociopolitical institutions of the church as he was of those of government. But he vigorously defended the right of all individuals to worship as they would so choose.

What he opposed was the establishment of a church by the state, and the levying of taxes to pay for its operations. He fully agreed with Patrick Henry's defense of the tobacco farmers in the Parsons' trial in which drought-stricken farmers (many Anglican), had been sued to pay back taxes for the wages of Anglican preachers.

The setting for Jefferson's famous Danbury letter in which he wrote his oft-quoted, oft-misused "wall-of-separation-between-church-and-state" phrase, was similar: Connecticut Baptists were being taxed to pay for the state's official Congregationalist churches.

In sum, Jefferson was a staunch believer in the freedom of religion. He was convinced that the Constitution was incomplete without a Bill of Rights that would include religious rights.

Although Jefferson held an unfavorable opinion of Judaism, he also said the following, in a letter written in 1820:

> [My] own country has been the first to prove to the world two truths, the most salutary to human society, that man can govern himself and that religious freedom is the most effectual anodyne against religious dissension. . . . [I am] happy in the restoration, of the Jews particularly, to their social rights, and hope they will be seen taking their seats on the benches of science, as preparatory to their doing the same at the board of government.

And in another letter, also written in 1820, he wrote:

> [I have] ever felt regret at seeing a sect [the Jews], the parent and basis of all those of Christendom, singled out by [Christians] for a persecution and oppression which proved they have profited nothing from the benevolent doctrines of him whom they profess to make the model of their principle and practice.

Jefferson's wall was not meant to favor a certain set of values at the expense of others; it was meant to preclude the state from mandating, prohibiting, or subsidizing the practice of a certain religion. In other words, Jefferson's wall was meant to preserve the freedom of choice in religious worship.

This is a far cry from the current position of the ACLU, People for the American Way, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Unlike Adams and Jefferson, these groups almost seem to deny even the existence of a Supreme Being. They certainly want to limit the implementation of Judeo-

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Christian tenets in our laws, our social contract, and our popular culture. These tenets are the cornerstones of our government and our society. Unless we preserve them, we will lose our liberty a bit at a time, starting with our religious freedom.

BRUCE CRAWFORD
Fountain Valley, California

RICHARD A. SAMUELSON writes:

Samuel Rabinove and Lawrence Hyman take me to task for criticizing the contemporary American model of church-state relations, and maintain that our government is neutral with regard to religion. If only it were so. When the National Endowment for the Arts funds a work like "Piss Christ" but cannot fund religious art, and when the schools may teach that homosexuality is just an "alternative life-style" but not that our religious traditions condemn the practice, the state is guilty of picking winners and losers among competing faiths.

The powers that be in America assume that a radical artist and a relativist philosopher espouse positions that are somehow areligious, and therefore can pass constitutional muster. In my essay I tried to point out why this premise is flawed.

Though they agree with me in deploring contemporary church-state relations, my four other critics, Messrs. McCain, Taylor, West, and Crawford, argue that Jefferson was a typical religious rationalist, not an anti-religious zealot; that his criticism of Judaism was no different from that of other Unitarians of the day; and that his wall of separation was standard for the era, not an aggressive move against religion.

Robert Stacy McCain, to begin with, reproaches me for daring to criticize Jefferson at all. This I cannot accept. Though Jefferson held many beliefs that I admire (his ideas on federalism, for example), on matters of religion I think he was off-base and see no reason not to say so.

Jameson T. Taylor reminds us that Jefferson attended religious services while he was President. *Mea culpa*. Jefferson was one of the most astute politicians of his age, and his religious beliefs had been criticized in the strongest terms, so it should not be surprising that he uttered words of prayer in public. He did this to keep up appearances while, as Thomas G. West notes, keeping his true opinions hidden from the general citizenry. Mr. Taylor also accuses me of calling Jefferson an atheist. Jefferson was a deistic Unitarian, which is what I labeled him.

In discussing Jefferson's zealotry, the contrast with John Adams, another Unitarian and man of the Enlightenment, is again instructive. Although he criticized Judaism and most other religions, Adams also called the emergence of ethical monotheism "the greatest wonder of antiquity." Jefferson, on the other hand, complained that Jewish ethics "were not only imperfect, but often irrec-

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oncilable with the sound dictates of reason & morality." These are not isolated examples, but part of a pattern indicating that Jefferson, unlike Adams, could not interpret other religions disinterestedly.

Bruce Crawford is correct in noting that Jefferson was a strong supporter of religious tolerance and wished that the state would stop persecuting Jews for their beliefs. But this does not alter Jefferson's abhorrence of Judaism. I specifically chose the term anti-Judaism rather than anti-Semitism in order to highlight the fact that Jefferson disdained Judaism but not Jews. Yet the question remains whether a declared opponent of religion should be the source for our model of church-state relations.

As for the wall of separation, if Jefferson himself intended it as an attack on traditional religion, why should we doubt him? Believing that only Unitarianism would survive disestablishment, Jefferson assumed that all Americans would join his church once the wall of separation was erected. That he was wrong does not alter his intent.

To show that Jefferson was not opposed to religious education in the schools, Mr. Taylor quotes Jefferson as denying that "instruction in religious opinion and duties was meant to be precluded by the public authorities, as indifferent to the interests of society." True enough; instead, as the context makes plain, such instruction was "meant to be precluded" on other grounds—namely, that it was a violation of church-state separation. To explain: the statement occurs in a report adopted by the Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia on October 7, 1822, which actually defends the university's *refusal* to hire a professor of divinity on the grounds that doing so would violate the wall of separation—the exact opposite of what Mr. Taylor is trying to demonstrate.

Finally, to return to the present: on the wall of separation, the main difference between Jefferson and the members of today's anti-religious establishment is that they no longer regard their own beliefs as "religion."

Chess

TO THE EDITOR:

I read with interest Boris Gulko's article, "Is Chess Finished?" [July]. As an amateur player and professional chess journalist, I have the greatest respect for Grandmaster Gulko's judgment in these matters. However, his smooth and plausible prose may be boiled down to two points: (1) that chess is an art beyond the ken of mere machines; and (2) that world champion Garry Kasparov lost to the computer Deep Blue because he was not in good form.

The first point is obviously false: the chess world has observed the steady upward progress in the performance of chess-playing machines for 40 years, with no observable flattening of their trajectory to date. (This is literally true, as graphs demonstrate.) Forty years ago, chess players were saying: "Yes, it's possible to teach a machine the rules, but it will never be able to compete with skilled human players." Soon the skeptics had to back off a bit: "All right, machines can beat average tournament players, but they'll never beat masters." Retreating to higher ground as the water rose, they then said: "Ah, but machines will never beat grandmasters—grandmasters are special; their play is qualitatively different from that of lesser mortals."

Then the first computer beat a grandmaster. The skeptics, now treading water, dismissed this as a fluke, a bad day for the human. But soon it was happening often enough that it became clear some machines were, indeed, playing at grandmaster level, and the skeptics were reduced to their last stand: the mystical belief that no machine would ever beat the *world champion*.

Now comes Deep Blue and beats the world chess champion in a set match, after playing toughly against him in another match a year earlier. How could this happen? Grandmaster Gulko says (and this is his second point) that Kasparov was not in good form. Notice that Mr. Gulko has refined the "bad-day" argument, by claiming that Kasparov had a "bad week." How many bad days in a row must a human have before the skeptics will admit that, just maybe, there is something to this computer-chess thing?

But even if it is true that Kasparov was not in form, Mr. Gulko's point is moot. It is obvious that machines are playing better every year, while the best human players are not perceptibly improving. In other words, if Kasparov had not lost this time, he would have lost next time, or perhaps the time after that. It is pure romantic bravado to pretend otherwise.

Romantics persist, of course. In addition to Mr. Gulko, three-time U.S. champion Lev Alburt (like Gulko, a Soviet grandmaster who emigrated here) published an article in the July 1997 issue of *Chess Life*, the national magazine of the U.S. Chess Federation, brashly titled "Computers Will *Never* Surpass the Best Human Chess Players." Perhaps the article went to press before Kasparov's debacle in New York. As Will Rogers once wrote, "In America, people who say it can't be done are usually interrupted by someone who is doing it"—or in this case, by some computer that has just done it.

Some people will never admit the obvious if it clashes with their self-esteem or deeply held beliefs. It is not surprising that a man like Boris Gulko, who has devoted his life to what he calls the "art" of chess, should be reluctant to admit the truth. But unless IBM loses interest in this diversion, it seems obvious to objective observers that machines, even with their occasional dumb moves, will continue to improve beyond the level of their human teachers.

Boris Gulko asks, "Is Chess Finished?" His answer is no, but his entire line of argument suggests that chess would be finished if machines were indeed to surpass humans. My answer to his question is also no, but for a different reason. Long after the computer-vs.-human competition has been settled definitively in favor of the machine, chess will survive and prosper in the same form it always has: as a competition among humans. Human players will still battle among themselves for intellectual brag-

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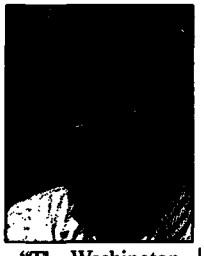

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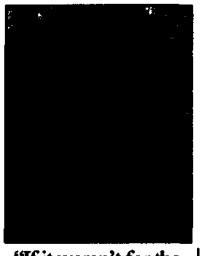

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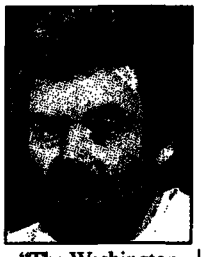

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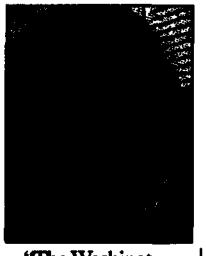

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ging rights, and chess fans will eagerly follow the fight vicariously, whether in real time over the Internet or later in the pages of a magazine or well-annotated book. May the best man—or woman—win.

TIMOTHY HANKE
Editor, Chess Horizons
Newburyport, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Boris Gulko is understandably reluctant to concede human-like abilities to chess computers, in particular the ability to plan. This has long been an assertion of strong players, and I believe it basically represents a state of denial. It is connected with the human propensity to reify concepts: we conceive of a thing called "planning," and we believe that it requires an intelligent mind; by definition, a computer does not have intelligence; *ergo*, the computer cannot plan. Case dismissed.

Operationally, however, this is by no means so clear-cut. For example, imagine you are playing a fairly simple king-and-pawn endgame against a computer—and give the computer a passed pawn (i.e., a pawn whose path to its queening square is not blocked by your own opposing pawns). Invariably the computer will attempt to move that passed pawn toward its queening square. The closer the pawn gets, the more the computer strives to push it forward. It is evident that the motivation for the computer's "planning to queen" is provided by the large advantage it foresees if the pawn actually does queen.

Now go back to the initial position, turn the board around by 180 degrees, and you are the one who has the passed pawn. You find that you too will push the passed pawn and "plan to queen." In fact, your chosen sequence of moves may be exactly the same as that of the computer. As a chess player would say: the "logic" of the position demands such a plan.

We can expand and generalize this little example to formulate a rough, working definition of planning in chess: the player (1) examines many different possible sequences of moves; (2) evaluates each step of each sequence; and (3) selects the sequence that gives the best final evaluation.

Of course the precise details of how these sequences are selected and evaluated are quite different for a silicon chip on the one hand and a human brain on the other. But it is clear that the overall process is the same for both types of player. And as of May 1997, it is also clear that the best computer is on a par with the best human in this process.

Let me gently suggest to Grandmaster Gulko, to his fellow-grandmasters, and to other chess players that perhaps now is the time to stop berating computers, but instead to use them more actively in analyzing the areas which continue to fascinate devotees of the Royal Game: things like finding opening novelties, clarifying complex mid-game combinations, and calculating deceptively simple-looking endings.

The game of chess is not finished—but the war is over.

JOSEPH FAUCHER
Carlsbad, California

BORIS GULKO writes:

I completely agree with Timothy Hanke that computers have made astonishing progress in playing chess over the past 40 years. I also agree that this progress will continue until it reaches a degree of strength beyond what I can foresee. But I still disagree with Mr. Hanke's evaluation of the match between Deep Blue and Garry Kasparov.

My opinion, in common with that of most grandmasters, is that Deep Blue played at a level indistinguishable from other top-of-the-line chess computers. Kasparov simply played uncharacteristically badly and lost. Deep Blue's performance hardly represented a breakthrough of some kind.

The Deep Blue-Kasparov match would have far greater significance if its outcome were to be repeated in a rematch, or in a match with other top chess players who have subsequently challenged IBM: world champion Anatoly Karpov (of the Fédération Internationale des Échecs), for one; women's world champion Susan Polgar, for another; or, still more interestingly, Kasparov, Karpov, and Polgar at once (a computer can play simultaneously against any number of chess titans without becoming flustered or fatigued).

IBM has rejected this approach, and, despite the tremendous publicity the corporation received from the spring 1997 match, it has no plans for further engagements with its machine. Having perhaps the clearest view of exactly how Deep Blue managed to subdue Garry Kasparov, IBM understandably prefers to rest on its laurels.

In his thoughtful letter, Joseph Faucher accuses me not of racism or sexism but of machinism: "now is the time to stop berating computers," he writes, and to stop assuming that they cannot perform tasks, like planning, that we humans "reify." This is an interesting line of argument, but I am afraid the very example he cites undercuts his argument.

Yes, in simple king vs. king-and-pawn endings, computers have been programmed to advance their pawns to the other side of the board so as to turn them into queens. And yes, this may make computers appear to be following a "plan." But in fact they are only carrying out calculations, looking far enough ahead until they arrive at a decisive result. In more complicated positions, with more pieces on the board, mere calculation, for the reasons I set forth in my article, does not suffice. It yields only the kind of aimless play that we saw on occasion even in the Kasparov-Deep Blue match.

In short, I will "never admit the obvious," as Mr. Hanke puts it, particularly when the obvious happens to be wrong. And as for whether I am in what Mr. Faucher calls a state of denial, I deny it, unequivocally.

Belief & Unbelief

TO THE EDITOR:

According to the review by Jon D. Levenson [August], Elliott Abrams argues in his new book, *Faith or Fear: How Jews Can Survive in a Christian America*, that unless American Jews become religiously observant, Judaism in the United States will die out. He may

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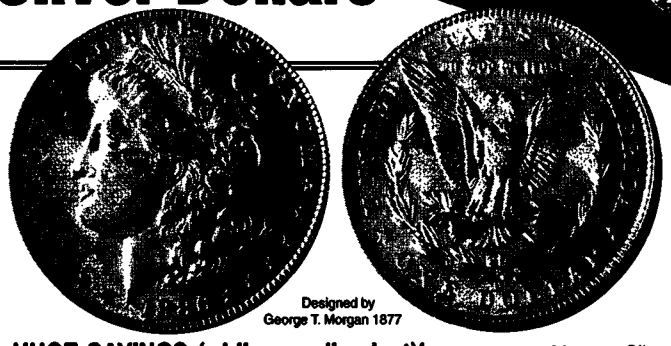

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be right (I hope not). But can that persuade the millions of us who are secular to reorient our whole lives?

Abrams, Mr. Levenson says, maintains that a Jewish revival in American can come about only if most Jews relinquish "their doctrinaire attachment to secularism." This is a singularly disrespectful way of describing the attitude of most of the Jews I know. We are secular because we are not persuaded that keeping kosher, avoiding elevators on the Sabbath, or even repeating the ancient prayers are meaningful ways to God (if there is one). Religious observance will become part of our lives only if we find such observance rewarding on a day-to-day basis, not as a hollow contribution to Jewish continuity. Inner satisfaction must result to induce us to make the enormous sacrifices of time and effort that being observant entails. Preaching about the long-run advantages to the survival of the Jewish people will not do it.

The review does not tell us whether the book describes any personal rewards that might be derived from observance or has any suggestions for improving religious ritual to make it more meaningful. If these issues were brought up by Mr. Abrams, the reviewer has done him an injustice by not mentioning them.

EDITH U. FIERST
Washington, D.C.

JON D. LEVENSON writes:

Edith U. Fierst's quarrel is not with me but with Elliott Abrams. Whether she scores a valid point against him is, nonetheless, open to doubt. In Abrams's view, "Jews must fear, above all else, God's righteous wrath, and seek above all else to love God, keep His commandments, and teach them to their children." His use of the expression "above all else" tells me that his ultimate goal is neither "[i]nner satisfaction" nor "the survival of the Jewish people," but something higher—selfless commitment to the God of Israel. The paradox, of course, is that from the standpoint of traditional Judaism, selfless commitment results in the "inner satisfaction" and the "personal rewards" that Abrams does not detail and that Edith Fierst has not yet found in Judaism.

Julius & the Colonel

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to add to Joseph Epstein's article, "The Colonel and the Lady" [August]. In the early 50's, when Eisenhower was President, there were two Jewish federal judges in the Northern District of Illinois, both of whom were appointed by Eisenhower at the request of Senator Everett Dirksen, a very powerful force in Washington.

The first Jewish judge appointed by Eisenhower in Illinois was Julius Hoffman. Since some members of his family were active financial contributors to the Republican party, Hoffman's appointment was understandable. He is best known for presiding at the conspiracy trial of the Chicago Seven after the 1968 Democratic convention. In legal circles he was known as "Julius the Just."

The other federal-court judge was Julius Miner. He was short and dumpy, a first-generation American who wore rumpled suits and spoke with a slight East European accent. Miner was active in the Jewish community and a fixture at most testimonials. He had a good legal mind and had served with distinction on the state court. He was known as "Just Julius."

It was common knowledge in Chicago political circles that "Just Julius" had a "rabbi," which means a person who provides the clout. Miner's sponsor, the man responsible for his appointment, was none other than Colonel Robert McCormick. I was told that Julius was a close confidant of the Colonel's. To think of the rumpled Julius and the fastidious Colonel from such different backgrounds still brings a smile to my face.

It is true that the vast majority of Jews in the Chicago area believed the Colonel to be anti-Semitic. I certainly was in this group. McCormick's isolationism and apparent disregard for the plight of the Jews in Europe were the principal cause of this attitude. We have since learned that others, thought to be friends of the Jews, were also unresponsive.

Joseph Epstein is correct that Colonel McCormick was a nut, but what a nut he was! Bright, capable, interesting. Warts and all, he was a fascinating character.

PHILIP J. SCHILLER
Chicago, Illinois

JOSEPH EPSTEIN writes:

My thanks to my fellow-Chicagoan, Philip J. Schiller. Until I read his letter, I was ignorant of our city's two Juliuses.

Great Composers

TO THE EDITOR:

I had two thoughts on Terry Teachout's most interesting article, "No More Great Composers?" [August].

First, it seems to me that Sergei Prokofiev stands above the other 20th-century figures Mr. Teachout names as "great" and has in fact become one of the "super greats"—probably surpassing Schumann and certainly approaching the stature of Brahms. One could argue that Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto is the greatest concerto ever written and that his *Romeo and Juliet* ballet is the greatest dance music ever written. And a number of his other orchestral works and violin and piano concertos are also in the standard repertory.

Secondly, what Mr. Teachout fails to stress is that there seems to be no music written since the 1950's now in the standard repertory. In opera, the most recent works currently being performed are those of Alban Berg (d. 1935). A group that includes Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* (1945) and *Billy Budd* (1951), Dmitri Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* (1934, revised 1963), and Igor Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (1951) may be moving into the "standard rep," but even these have been around for quite a while.

And can Mr. Teachout think of any pieces in the concert repertory that were composed since Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony (1944) and Samuel Barber's Violin Concerto (1940)?

So perhaps the current music scene is worse than Mr. Teachout makes it out to be.

ROBERT W. WILSON
New York City

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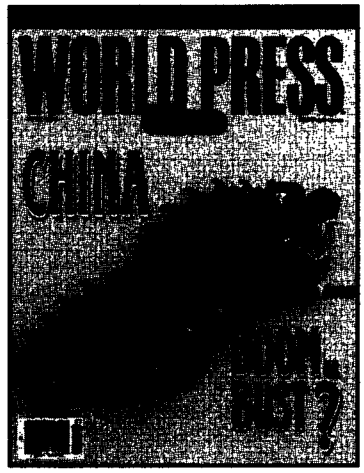

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TO THE EDITOR:

I believe I can count on the fingers of one hand the instances in which I have disagreed with anything Terry Teachout has written. In fact, I consider his articles reason alone to subscribe to COMMENTARY. Yet I must, for once, take issue with him. Specifically, I cannot agree with his suggestion that contemporary concert audiences are not only beginning to "pay attention to new classical compositions" but actually to welcome them, as shown by the inclusion of these works in the current programming of major symphony orchestras. Really?

Over the past twenty years, I have had the privilege of being a subscriber to some of the world's great symphony orchestras: Los Angeles 1974-79, Philadelphia 1979-89, and St. Louis from 1990 to the present. Of these three, the St. Louis Symphony, under the direction of Leonard Slatkin, played contemporary works most often. While the reason officially given for Slatkin's departure to Washington's National Symphony was his wish to pursue greater opportunities, there was, in fact, another, less public, explanation for his leaving: the disaffection felt by the St. Louis audience for his contemporary programming. Slatkin was and is largely loved by the St. Louis audience, and I myself enjoy and respect him immensely; but make no mistake about it, concertgoers did not like having the music of, say, Donald Erb rammed down their throats so that they could enjoy Mahler or Beethoven after intermission. This, mind you, is not hearsay, but rather the grumbling I witnessed firsthand.

My point, then, is that I do not think Mr. Teachout should assume that concertgoers enjoy contemporary programming just because they have been made to listen to it. In fact, I believe the opposite is more accurate; that is, as a rule, we do not enjoy it at all. It is not that we do not wish to expand our musical horizons, but that most performances of new music have been unsatisfying in the extreme and most of the works mediocre at best. In speaking to people in other cities, I conclude that these sentiments are not unique to St. Louis.

In conclusion, let me echo Mr. Teachout's hope that "a new genius is indeed among us now, busily writing scores that will change the face of music." My belief is that such a person will turn out to be a Neoromantic, since there is something about the tonality, lyricism, and emotional content of the music from Beethoven to Mahler that moves us profoundly in a way that atonal or contemporary music cannot.

MARTIN WAX
Wildwood, Missouri

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

I had the thoughtful words of Robert W. Wilson and Martin Wax very much in mind when writing an article on the new tonalists that will appear in a forthcoming issue of COMMENTARY. In lieu of addressing their specific points here—especially Martin Wax's provocative suggestion that the great composers of the future will be Neoromantic in style—I will simply say that I hope they will find this piece at least partly responsive to their understandable concerns. I also hope at some later date to consider in detail the interesting case of Sergei Prokofiev.

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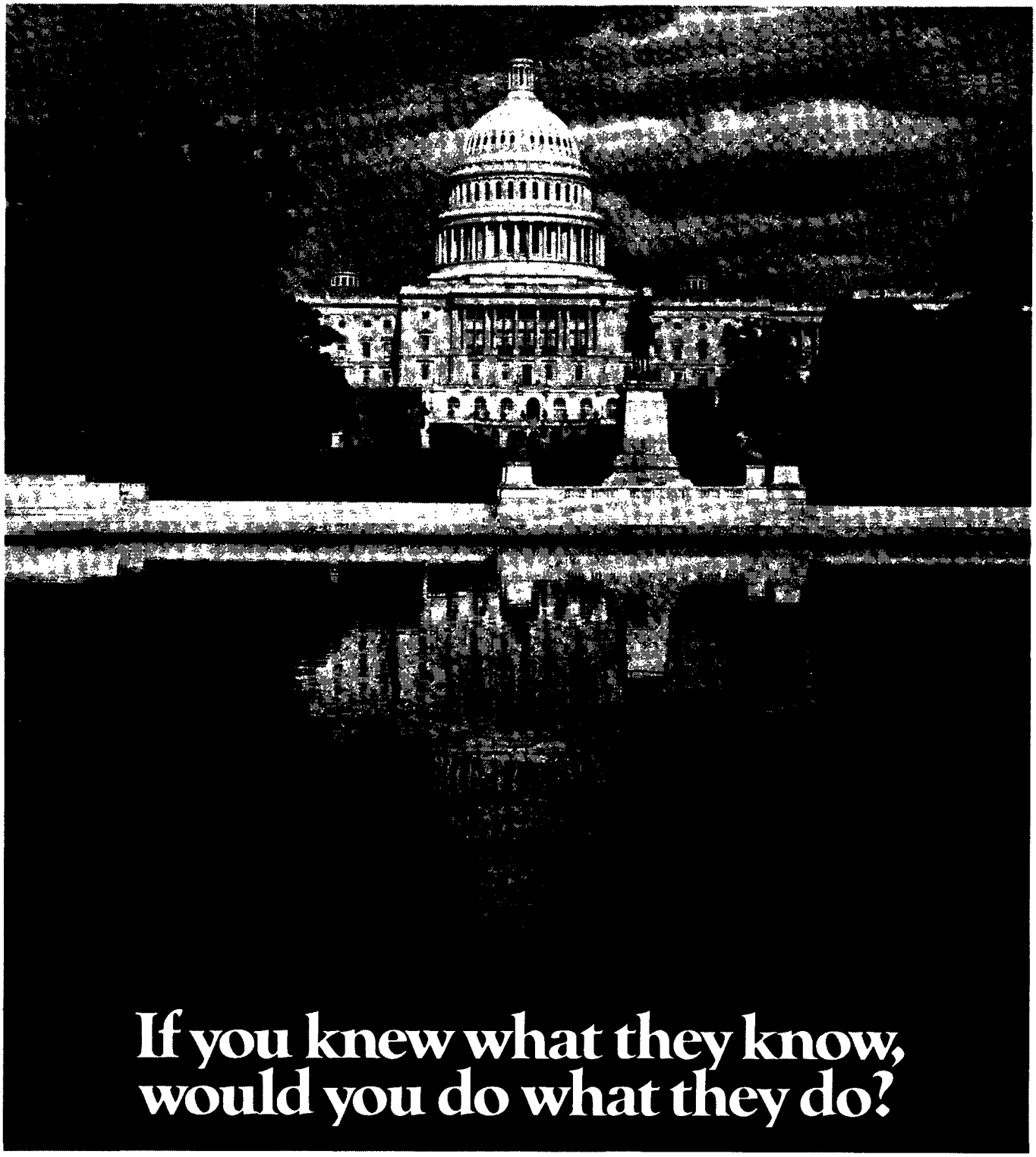

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Commentary
November 1997

What Good Is Government?

William J. Bennett & John J. DiIulio, Jr.

NOBODY NEEDS to persuade most Americans that their national government is too big, taxes and regulates too much, and fails to accomplish enough of genuine public value. Much of what emanates from Washington is an uneconomical, uncoordinated, unholy mess, and almost everyone knows it. When President Clinton declared, in his 1996 State of the Union address, that "the era of big government is over," he was belatedly responding to the political pressures generated by this deep-seated knowledge, which ever since the days of Ronald Reagan has been the motive force behind conservative and Republican victories at the polls. Indeed, Clinton himself won the presidency in 1992 and then won it again in 1996 largely by exploiting conservative themes about relimiting government and restoring civil society.

For conservatives, there would thus seem to be cause for satisfaction at this new coincidence of views between the leadership of both political parties. But of late, conservatives have been doing more fretting than celebrating. Some complain that today's Republican-led Congress is proving itself incapable of sustaining the "revolution" launched by its immediate predecessor after 1994. Others lament the "loss of political momentum" represented, for example, by the Clinton administration's slow but steady gutting of the work requirements in the 1996 welfare-reform law. Still others carp that the latest bipartisan budget bill increases social spending by $70 billion in just its first year. The worry, in short, is that the fight against big government has no sooner begun than it is being toned down, qualified, or even abandoned, by Republicans and conservatives themselves no less than by Democrats and liberals.

There is something to this worry. But it also reflects the current state of confusion on both sides of the political aisle over exactly what our national government does, exactly what it can or should do, and what the American people want it to do. We are caught in one of those historic moments of transition, between one model of government, now 60 years old, with whose virtues and (especially) with whose defects we have become intimately familiar, and another model still very much in the making and yet to be adequately defined. In what follows we mean to contribute, however tentatively, to such a definition, in the first place by dispelling some false ideas.

II

TO BEGIN at the beginning: *is* the era of big government over, and if not, is it likely to be over any time soon? The realistic answer to both questions is no.

WILLIAM J. BENNETT *is co-director of Empower America and John M. Olin fellow in cultural-policy studies at the Heritage Foundation. His most recent book is* Our Sacred Honor. JOHN J. DIIULIO, JR. *is professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton and the co-editor (with Frank Thompson) of* Medicaid and the States, *forthcoming from Brookings.*

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Virtually every aspect of our lives is now touched by government. Washington underwrites support for the elderly and the disabled, for medical research, space missions, art museums, farmers, and mass transit. It subsidizes public television and mandates the number of hours that commercial networks must devote to "children's programs." It pays people to "volunteer" for national service. It builds prisons and supports public-housing projects and even midnight basketball. It provides food stamps, health care, college scholarships, loans, and grants. It involves itself in university admissions, hiring practices, family-leave policies, civil-rights laws, banking insurance and regulation, professional accrediting, air-traffic control, and parks administration. Among its obligations are protecting our air, water, and food; regulating tobacco and automobiles; constructing interstate highways; keeping out illegal immigrants and drugs; and providing pensions to our veterans.

This is only a partial list—and, needless to say, it all costs a lot. On the basis of the budget that has now become law, Americans will have at least $1.7-trillion-a-year's worth of national government as far as the fiscal eye can see. By every estimate, annual federal spending will top $2 trillion before the year 2003.

In order to get some earthly perspective on such astronomical figures, consider the humble fiscal facts behind the welfare-reform law, universally and deservedly acknowledged to be the single most far-reaching legislative action of the historic 104th Congress. This act abolished a means-tested federal-state program for low-income households, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). But AFDC accounted for only about $22 billion a year in federal spending—much less than two cents of every federal dollar. And the act *continued* federal cash assistance via block grants to states, at funding levels largely comparable to AFDC.

Again: last June, members of the House commerce committee voted to cut $15 billion over five years from Medicaid, the joint federal-state program that provides health-care insurance to some 35 million low-income, elderly, and disabled Americans. But between 1988 and 1994, Medicaid spending *grew* by about $100 billion, roughly $77 billion of which were federal dollars, and will likely grow by another $40 billion or more by 2002. And incidentally, the same House panel that voted for the much-publicized $15 billion in cuts also approved a new $16-billion grant to the states to expand health-care coverage for uninsured children.

Where do the other hundreds of billions in federal money go every year? Roughly half goes to the "3 15's and a nickel"—15 percent each to national defense, grants to states and localities, and net interest payments, and 5 percent to other federal operations. The other half goes to payments to individuals. Of the latter, half again are made via entitlement programs that directly benefit the majority of all Americans, including many with annual incomes of $50,000 or more.

And what can be cut from all this? By the time the 104th Congress arrived in Washington in January 1995, the proportion of "big government" that consisted of nondefense discretionary spending, including such items as Head Start, public housing, and interstate highways, had already been squeezed by almost half in the 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act and still further in its 1993 successor. In 1995 and 1996, as we have seen, programs for low-income families and individuals followed suit, absorbing over 90 percent of all cuts to entitlement programs.

The reason the only sizable cuts in the "nanny state" have fallen on programs for the poor rather than on those benefiting the middle class and the affluent is simple. In survey after survey, clear majorities of Americans have said that they would rather *prevent* cuts to most federal programs than balance the budget or shrink the deficit. As many as 80 percent or more favor maintaining or expanding Social Security and Medicare. For Medicaid the parallel figure is over 70 percent, and over 60 percent favor student loans, veterans' hospitals, environmental protection, unemployment insurance, and other programs. In a period like the present one, when economic growth has boosted tax revenues and shrunk the deficit, there is likely to be even less pressure for significant cuts to big-ticket entitlements and discretionary spending programs for the nonpoor.

III

THE LARGE majorities in favor of retaining government entitlement programs raise a question about what was in the mind of the American people when in 1994 they gave control of both the House and the Senate to the Republicans. Certainly many of those newly elected Senators and Congressmen read the results as a mandate to downsize government.

But the election results can also be read in other ways. For one thing, the Republican victory, which was in any case not the landslide it is sometimes depicted as being, may have had less to do with ideas than with long-term electoral trends. Thus, in

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every election from 1968 to 1992, the percentage of the vote going to Republicans in congressional battles had been higher than the percentage of seats actually won by Republicans. What happened in 1994 is that the party finally succeeded in closing the gap. In the words of the political scientist Gary C. Jacobson, "Most of the seats the [GOP] added in 1994 were seats a Republican should have held in the first place."

For Republicans, the good news is that the factors behind this trend are likely to continue. One such factor is the increasing suburbanization of the electorate. Another is the increasing consolidation of the Republican hold on the South. (In 1996, Republicans added Southern House seats even as they lost seats elsewhere, and the South was also the only region where Bob Dole's popular vote nosed out Bill Clinton's.) Finally, gathering Republican strength at the state level is a bellwether of greater strength at the national level.

We hardly mean to suggest that issues and ideas have played no role in all this: nobody who followed the course of Hillary Clinton's health-care fiasco could contend such a thing. More broadly, as the political analyst Everett Carll Ladd has written, Republicans have indeed benefited from an ongoing "philosophical realignment": ever larger majorities of voters have become more conservative, "especially in the sense of being far less inclined to accept claims that more government represents progress." As we noted above, when Bill Clinton won the presidency, he did so in large measure by playing to this growing conservative mood.

Nevertheless, Ladd argues, the continuities in voting behavior "are in many ways more striking than the . . . departures." So far, the philosophical realignment has produced no decisive party realignment and consolidated no conservative governing majority. In 1996, Ladd concludes,

> Voters again elected a President of one party and gave congressional majorities to the other. . . . They again signaled a desire to curb the growth of national government, though not to cut it greatly.

This seems to us to sum up the situation very well. The public may not have the scale of government it prefers, but there is little evidence that it wants government to withdraw from the *spheres* in which it is now involved, or to downsize simply for the sake of downsizing. This reading of the mood of the electorate was confirmed, moreover, when the Republican majority in Congress did set out to cut government "greatly." In mid-1995, House Republicans proposed eliminating no less than $1.4 trillion in projected federal spending by the year 2002, while Senate Republicans proposed cuts of $961 billion. In 1996, a House budget-committee resolution called for terminating, turning into block grants, or privatizing 3 cabinet departments, 284 programs, 69 commissions, and 13 agencies.

The effect of these ambitious proposals was that, between December 1994 and June 1996, the 104th Congress's net approval rating fell like a rock. In the meantime, the President's steadily improved. In March 1995, according to an ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, almost twice as many people were worried that Republicans would go too far in cutting needed programs than that Democrats would go too far in defending wasteful ones.

THE SHIFT in public sentiment can be explained in part by willful Democratic exaggerations of the size and scope of the proposed Republican cuts. But that is only one element of the story. Another has to do with the inability of the Republican leadership to offer a persuasive defense of their plans against reasonable criticisms and concerns.

Consider Medicare. When this program first became law in 1965, estimated spending for 1990 was projected at $8 billion. By the time 1990 rolled around, *actual* Medicare spending was nearly $160 billion and rising; by 1995, the system was (as it remains) headed for bankruptcy. In the words of the *Wall Street Journal*, "Medicare is growing so fast that by 2001 it will overtake all federal spending on defense; by 2005 it will exceed defense by $100 billion."

What to do? In the 104th Congress, the GOP proposed to cap overall Medicare spending. That proposal is now history. In the 105th Congress, the party has sought to modify the program by giving its beneficiaries financial incentives to economize (mostly by shifting from fee-for-service to so-called medical savings accounts). The elderly, Republicans argue, need more "choice," while future technologies will inevitably yield better care for all at less cost. But conservative lawmakers have so far failed to explain how we are to reduce the rate of growth in Medicare without causing millions of elderly Americans to receive less financial help from Washington, get worse care, or be thrown back on their own savings or the support of their often resistant or resourceless families.

It clearly will not do to assert that the public has already "voted for" cuts in Medicare or, for that matter, any of the other major entitlement programs. What the public has voted for is more complicated than that, and what it will stand for, it

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seems, is very little. In the absence of compelling alternatives, most Americans prefer the status quo, far from perfect though they know it to be, to radical retrenchment.

Faced with these apparently intractable facts, some conservatives have persuaded themselves that other means exist to solve the problem of big government. One, which goes by the name of devolution, is to kick things back from Washington to the states. Another is to hand them over to "civil society." Both these ideas are estimable in and of themselves; but as solutions to the perceived problem, they are partial at best.

IV

DEVOLUTION—VESTING as much decision- and policy-making power as possible in what Edmund Burke called the "little platoons" of society—is an idea for which a strong case can be made: philosophical, political, and practical. Why indeed should anyone assume that a Secretary of Health and Human Services in Washington knows better than the governor of Michigan what is good for the children of that state, or which welfare approach will work best there? Moreover, popular support for devolution is high, mirroring the popular disapproval of big government and bloated bureaucracy.

Best of all, evidence is accumulating that local initiative works. In the areas of welfare and education, what Governors Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, John Engler of Michigan, and Arne Carlson of Minnesota have been able to accomplish in a few short years puts Washington to shame, and the same goes, in the area of criminal justice, for Mayor Rudolph Giuliani of New York City.

But for all its virtues, the paradoxical fact is that devolution *per se* does nothing to contain the size and scope of federal power. Many federal programs are already highly devolved to state and local governments through block grants. The real "Washington bureaucracy" is composed not of the two million nondefense federal bureaucrats—about the same number as in 1960, before the fifteenfold growth in expenditures since the Great Society—but of the millions and millions of people who work indirectly for the national government as employees of state and local agencies, private firms, and nonprofit organizations that are largely if not entirely funded by federal dollars. About 90 percent of federal civilian workers live elsewhere than Washington and its environs, a reality brought home with tragic poignancy by the Oklahoma City bombing.

As the political scientist Donald F. Kettl has documented, today's national government is "government by proxy." Only about 4 percent of the federal budget, Kettl estimates, goes to programs or services that the federal government delivers directly. Mainly the tasks are performed by state and local governments, followed by private and nonprofit contractors. Indeed, every national domestic-policy initiative of the past six decades has been a version of government by proxy.

Thus, the interstate highway system was built through grants to state and local governments and contracts with private construction companies. Under the direction of state health and human-services officials, private financial intermediaries manage most of the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Contractors perform the clean-ups at the Superfund sites of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Universities and other nonprofit organizations devise and direct federally-funded projects in areas ranging from biomedical research to juvenile justice. The federal prison system and the Federal Aviation Administration—two of the relatively few federal agencies that do directly administer federal laws—rely heavily on private contractors to perform many different functions. Even financing and payments under the Social Security Act are administered by the states (subject to review by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

As for the now-defunct AFDC program, it was administered as a joint federal-state program on the basis of a legal commitment by Washington to match state spending; in effect, AFDC was an entitlement to state governments, and was accordingly managed under a mind-boggling array of local eligibility requirements, work provisions, and more. For well over a decade now, Medicaid too has been evolving into a highly decentralized program in which states take the lead in defining eligibility criteria, streamlining payment procedures, and deciding which, if any, costly auxiliary services get provided.

Supporters of devolution tend to speak of block grants not only as if they were something new but as if they were a proven device for cutting spending and/or a sure-fire way of improving performance. They are neither.

Between 1966 and 1993, there were 23 block-grant programs for the states, fifteen of which were still in effect when the 104th Congress was elected. Total federal aid to the states was $127 billion in 1980; in 1994, *after* the Reagan years with their ostensible commitment to cutting back, it was an estimated $170 billion.

Nor, as John P. Walters has shown, do block grants necessarily guarantee greater efficiency or

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even a greater degree of control on the part of citizens. Block grants can simply "transfer wealth and authority to state and local bureaucrats who are . . . often less efficient, less responsive, and more prone to corruption than federal bureaucrats." In addition, "devolving federal power" has often meant reducing the federal government's capacity to monitor and correct. It has helped produce fraud and record overpayments in Medicare; the flawed Hubble space telescope; some of the worst defense-procurement scandals ever; the illegal diversion of tens of millions of dollars in food stamps; spectacular defaults in the guaranteed student-loan program; excessive costs in the Superfund; the failure of the Internal Revenue Service's computer-modernization project; and malfeasance of Teapot Dome proportions in the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In the proper hands, devolution can be a potent weapon in the arsenal of a society attempting to recover the habits of self-government. But it is only one weapon, and its utility is limited. In the wrong hands, moreover, devolution is just as likely to be a recipe for spending money that the federal government does not have, for purposes that no one has clearly specified, with results that cannot be measured or evaluated until it is too late.

V

This brings us to the other great hope of conservatives: civil society. By this is meant the entire network of churches, charities, community groups, and other voluntary associations and institutions upon which our society has always depended for its successful functioning. According to at least one reading of the evidence, this network has been eviscerated by the growth and self-aggrandizement of government; families, churches, and community groups have been forced to surrender their authority to bureaucratic experts, with disastrous consequences not only for civility but for civilization itself. The retreat of government from the field would thus be a hopeful sign of progress, allowing these institutions to revive and resume their normal functions, which they have anyway always performed with far greater effectiveness.

Here, too, the evidence is in fact somewhat mixed. One thing still unclear, for example, is the degree to which government has indeed "crowded out" familial, communal, corporate, and philanthropic activity. In articles published in 1995 and 1996, the political scientist Robert Putnam contended that fewer and fewer Americans were voting, joining the PTA, going to church, or participating in other civic associations and group activities, while more and more were "bowling alone." But Putnam's thesis has come under severe challenge by analysts who assert that, to the contrary, the number of Americans volunteering for groups and causes remains huge and shows no signs of declining. Bowling leagues may be down, but soccer leagues are up.

An even tougher question to answer is whether volunteer programs can operate on a large enough scale to deal effectively with hard-core social problems. A few years ago, Public/Private Ventures, a policy-research organization with which one of us has been affiliated, completed a systematic evaluation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America program. The findings were remarkably encouraging: for low-income children, many of them abused or neglected, just a few hours a week with a "Big" yielded a 50-percent average reduction in first-time drug use, a 33-percent reduction in violent behavior, and measurable improvements in school performance. But the number of children who could benefit from this program or one like it remains far in excess of the number of adults who volunteer for it.

Whether such institutions are growing in number is again difficult to say. Most urban black churches, for example, run or participate directly in community-service activities that reach beyond their own membership—staffing day-care facilities, offering drug- and alcohol-abuse prevention programs, administering food banks, building shelters, serving as after-school safe havens, and more. But are such faith-based social programs more or less common today than they were ten, twenty, or thirty years ago?

In any case, the basic issue may be less one of numbers, or even of efficacy, than of sheer capacity. According to Princeton's Julian Wolpert, about 125,000 organizations in America operate as charities with receipts of at least $25,000 a year. Their combined revenues and expenditures are about $350 billion annually—roughly *one-seventh* of what is spent by federal, state, and local government. Moreover, a third of those revenues come from government itself. If all of America's grant-making private foundations gave away all of their income and all of their assets, they could cover only a year's worth of current government expenditures on social welfare. It is unlikely that Americans will donate much more than their present 2 percent of annual household income, or that corporate giving will take up any significant proportion of the slack in the event of further government reductions.

An energetic civil society is a blessing beyond compare, and government is no substitute for its myriad institutions. But getting government out of

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our lives would not *ipso facto* lead to a rebirth of those institutions, particularly ones that may have atrophied, and particularly if they have atrophied for reasons that are as much cultural (think, for instance, of the influence of television and the movies) as political. Nor, in the end, can civil institutions themselves, no matter how energetic, be a substitute for government.

VI

BUT WHAT sort of government do we need? In 1964, former President Eisenhower said:

> We Republicans believe in limited government, but also in effective government. We believe in keeping government as close to the people as possible. . . . But we do not shrink from a recognition that there are national problems that require national solutions.

Thirty-three years later, Eisenhower's words seem more relevant than ever, encapsulating a truly national view of our situation and suggesting not just a Republican but a republican way forward.

Perhaps the first lesson these words suggest is the need for all Americans, including those most offended by the depredations of big government, to make their peace with the persistent popular majorities whose duly-elected representatives have supported and sustained the national government's post-New Deal role. That role in itself is not the problem; however they may grumble, Americans want government to perform it, or something like it. Nor is the problem *simply* one of the size of government. Rather, partly on account of sheer size, but more on account of bad ideas in the hands of executors with arbitrary and unaccountable authority, our national government has fatally lost sight of what James Madison called the "permanent and aggregate interests of the community"—that is, of the public interest.

Only now, thanks to widespread disgust with what those ideas and that arbitrary authority have created, are we beginning to take stock of how badly the public interest has been served across the board: from law enforcement, to education, to family policy, to race relations, to tax law. Most saliently, unelected federal officials—whether bureaucrats or judges—have been permitted to define the public interest as they see fit and, through the reach of national power, to impose their understanding over and against the clearly expressed wishes both of representative institutions and of state and local governments, businesses, civic organizations, neighborhoods, and individuals. If our standard is to keep government "as close to the people as possible," then one of the most hopeful pieces of legislation passed by the 104th Congress was a little-noticed provision, authored by Senator Spencer Abraham, restricting the ability of federal judges to continue defying persistent public demands for laws prohibiting the arbitrary release of violent criminals. Similar sorts of restorative lawmaking are a prime desideratum.

Here is where the true value of devolution and civil society makes itself felt. For the foreseeable future, it seems, the social-policy "action" in America will be emanating less from Washington than from the states and localities, as well as from the sphere of private enterprise. That is all to the good. The seeds of a new reconstruction are being sown: from welfare reform to the revolution in health care, a whole array of promising initiatives, none of them conceived or directed by Washington (though some are at least partly subsidized by Washington), is beginning to undo the accumulated damage of a quarter-century and thereby to change the underlying relation of government and society. The eventual effect of these initiatives, if they are not impeded by the dead hand of the federal behemoth, will be to alter the definition not only of American politics, but of government itself.

In this period of experimentation, the role of responsible elected representatives in Washington is to monitor, to assess, to criticize, and even to propose—but first and foremost to foster and encourage. And in the meantime, there is plenty of other work to be done at the national level by a political class—in the nature of things, a conservative political class—bent not on dismantling but (to revert to Eisenhower's language) on limiting government and making it more effective. There may well be some federal agencies we would be better off without—the National Endowment for the Arts is one. On the other hand, calls to eliminate the EPA, for example, are unrealistic and out of touch with the wishes of the electorate; Americans want federal controls on the air they breathe as much as on the meat they consume. Still, *someone* has to start the decade-long task of bringing the morass of federal environmental regulations and the litigation they have spawned into line with the public interest properly understood. And the EPA is only one instance, if among the most egregious, of a much more pervasive problem.

IMPROVING THE performance of government hardly exhausts the matter, however. Perhaps the most pernicious legacy of the era of expanded government has been to engender widespread pub-

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lic mistrust of, precisely, government itself. This mistrust is founded on larger considerations than federal waste and inefficiency.

It has often been remarked how liberalism, by creating ever new categories of rights, and by relentlessly expanding the sphere of "entitlement," has devalued the habits of self-reliance and individual responsibility that are critical to economic and social advancement. What is less often remarked is the extent to which these same sturdy habits, the defining marks of a free citizenry, are and must be constitutive of the entire American political order. Should we really be surprised when people inculcated with the thoroughly infantilizing idea that government exists to take care of their "needs" begin to regard that government with increasing petulance and disrespect? During the 1992 presidential debate in Richmond, Virginia, a middle-aged man stood up in the audience and asked the three candidates: "We're not under oath at this point, but could you make a commitment to the citizens of the United States to meet our *needs*?—and we have many." Neither George Bush, nor Ross Perot, nor, assuredly, Bill Clinton dared challenge the premise of the question. Every parent knows the symptoms of this insatiable disease; a wise one takes steps to prevent them from developing.

To this injury has been added still another: the breaking-down—the deconstruction—of our common American culture, of the American idea. Liberalism brought us not only the era of big government, now officially declared to be over, but the era of official, government-sponsored polarization. It was a bureau of the federal government that in the late 1960's began systematically to infiltrate our way of doing business and educating our young with the insidious practice of counting by race; and it is our national government that through its dogged adherence to these policies and a galaxy of related ones continues daily to go about dividing us by race, gender, and ethnicity, setting us each against the other and then wondering aloud why we cannot "talk."

No amount of devolution, no revival of civil society, can by themselves recreate this bedrock condition of our political existence: the knowledge that we are one nation, indivisible. To the contrary, the very act of draining authority away from Washington, and of encouraging the spirit of individual and civic initiative, may, in the absence of countervailing forces, tend rather to hasten than to impede the further atomizing of society. But neither is it imaginable that we can simply demand of citizens respect for a national government that has shown itself unworthy of their respect.

There is a trap here to which conservatives in particular may be susceptible. As Gertrude Himmelfarb has written in these pages,* in their impassioned and wholly understandable rush to decry big government and extol the virtues of civil society, many otherwise sensible conservatives have come perilously close to delegitimating the idea of government itself. Others, of a frankly libertarian stripe, have gone even farther; characterizing 60 years of expanded government programs as a kind of scam perpetrated on a society of native individualists yearning to breathe free, they not only seek to limit government but practically to do away with it.

THE TASK as we see it is instead to limit government; to make it more effective; and to keep it as close to the people as possible. But it is also to conserve, to rebuild, and to restore. The restoration of the American government as a true expression of the American idea cannot be achieved by an act of Congress, or triggered by a provision in a spending bill, or, alas, materialized in an act of will by the American people. It is a task for national leadership, and only national leadership can accomplish it. Ronald Reagan, who paradoxically came to office on a platform for relimiting government, may have come closer than any statesman in living memory both to grasping what is required for the task and, in his person and spirit, to suggesting the elementary grounds for its realization.

It has been a long time since an American President could say with perfect assurance, as our first President did in his Farewell Address:

> This government, the offspring of our own choice uninfluenced and unawed, . . . has a just claim to your confidence and your support. Respect for its authority, compliance with its laws, acquiescence in its measures are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true liberty.

Thanks to decades of often mindless expansion, and even more so to policies that have undermined the habits of freedom, respect for the authority of government is at a low point in our country. But in a fundamental sense, that government remains what it was 200 years ago: the "offspring of our own choice." Without destroying the institution itself, we should study to fashion a better one, of which we can more honestly say that it exercises "a just claim on [our] confidence and [our] support."

* "For the Love of Country," May 1997.

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Yiddish: Past, Present, Imperfect

Ruth R. Wisse

On July 5 of this year, the foremost Yiddish scholar of the postwar generation, an Israeli citizen, died in Warsaw, Poland, and was buried in the Jewish cemetery on Okapowa Street. Just three weeks earlier, on June 15, the new home of the National Yiddish Book Center was dedicated in Amherst, Massachusetts. These two occasions, one deeply redolent of the Old World, the other of the New, one somber, the other ablaze with public celebration, would appear to mark an end and a beginning in the centuries-long saga of Yiddish, the language of European Jews and their descendants. Whether this is truly so, the open-ended history of the Jews will finally determine. In the here and now, we can only register the strange turns this history continues to take, as well as the even stranger conjunction of events and of the men behind them.

The scholar, Khone Shmeruk, was born in Warsaw in 1921, and his early education in that city reflected the cultural ferment of Jewish life in the then newly reconstituted Polish republic. His home, modern in temper, was traditional in religious observance—probably because of the presence there of his maternal grandparents. Though his mother taught Hebrew in a private school, she enrolled her young son in a secular Yiddish school of the Jewish Socialist Bund. Later, he would attend a modern Hebrew school and then a (Jewish) high school where the language of instruction was Polish. At the insistence of his grandfather, he was also tutored privately in Talmud. In short, he had a well-rounded Jewish education before being admitted to Warsaw University in 1938, a year in which many Jewish students felt compelled to stand against the walls rather than sit in the segregated rows to which they had been assigned. Following the German occupation of the city in September 1939, he was encouraged by his parents to flee into Soviet territory, and there he stayed for the duration of the war, moving from place to place.

Returning to Warsaw in 1946, Shmeruk found nothing left of his home. The only members of his family still living were his grandparents, who had moved to Palestine in 1934. Though he considered settling in Warsaw, after marrying in 1946 he and his wife decided there was no future for them in Poland. Discouraged by his grandfather from trying to reach Palestine illegally, he marked time as a teacher in a Jewish school in Stuttgart, Germany, until he was finally able to move to Jerusalem in 1949, a year after the founding of the state of Israel. There his knowledge of Hebrew, which set him apart from most of the other immigrants, got

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him conscripted into military intelligence. When his superior officer saw an announcement in the paper about a new department of Yiddish at the Hebrew University, he insisted that Shmeruk apply for admission and even advanced him money to pay the fees.

At the age of thirty, Shmeruk thus resumed the university career he had interrupted twelve years earlier, and joined the first Yiddish class at the Hebrew University. It was taught by Dov Sadan, one of the most active Zionist recruiters in Germany and Poland during the 1920's and 30's, a prolific and elegant Hebrew writer, and an inspired researcher and critic of Jewish folklore, literature, and languages. Once Shmeruk entered the university, he never left it, taking up a full-time teaching position in 1961, the year he completed his doctorate. He was chairman of the department of Yiddish from 1970 to 1982, was elected to the Israel Academy of Sciences in 1986, and was awarded the Israel Prize, the state's highest civilian award, in 1996. His was an exemplary career.

WHAT SORT of scholar was he? Another student of Sadan's in 1951, Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovski), is now a professor of Hebrew and comparative literature at Yale University. The two prize students seemed to divide the field of Yiddish between them, the differences in their approach being more than a matter of method. Even as a young man, Harshav considered himself a child of the transformative revolution in politics and culture that had destroyed the Jewish past. He himself wrote modernist poetry in Yiddish and Hebrew under different pseudonyms, and was attracted to poets at the greatest remove from his own upbringing in Vilna, especially the experimental Americans Aaron Leyeles, Moishe Leib Halpern, and Jacob Glatstein. Shmeruk, by contrast, emphasized the integrative aspects of literary history, as though wanting to evoke through scholarship the interwoven culture that had been torn apart by the war. He was attracted by Yiddish writers who reminded him of his Warsaw home—I.L. Peretz and Isaac Bashevis Singer—and responded to the reach for national coherence in literature, writing about it in the works of Sholem Aleichem and the Soviet-Yiddish author Der Nister.

In fact, Shmeruk had come to the study of Yiddish out of a commitment to an ideology—Yiddishism—which held that the language itself, and the culture expressed in that language, could sustain the life of a secular Jewish community. Just as the Polish tongue expressed Polish identity, so the vernacular of European Jews had been imprinted with the moral and ethical content of Judaism, making modern speakers of Yiddish the carriers by definition of Jewish values. His attitude changed, however, when he began a serious study of the literature. For one thing, by separating Jewish civilization from its religious wellsprings, the Yiddishist movement had narrowed it; no one, Shmeruk recognized, could properly understand Yiddish without encompassing the full Jewish tradition, especially as it expressed itself in Hebrew. For another thing, there was, in actuality, no longer a reservoir of Yiddish literature in Eastern Europe; and, after his own generation, there would be no Yiddish-speaking literary community in America, either.

But the tragic evaporation of the language made it that much more urgent to develop Yiddish as a vital branch of Jewish learning. The pride Shmeruk had once invested in speaking Yiddish, he now reinvested in scholarship, determined to prove to his colleagues that no one could truly grasp the last thousand years of Jewish life in Europe without access to the language in which so much of it had been lived. Although interested in the modern period, he spent a great deal of time in the Bodleian library at Oxford, familiarizing himself with the beginnings of Yiddish literature in the 15th and 16th centuries; some of his most influential works fall into this area. In his passion for scholarly accuracy, he bequeathed to generations of grateful students a model of the scholar-sleuth.

I MET Shmeruk in 1967, and got to know him two years later when my husband and I visited Jerusalem. The minute we telephoned from our hotel he invited us over, and even came with his wife, Mira, to escort us. The approach to the Shmeruks' house was through a dark, overgrown garden and up a concrete flight of stairs, past the apartment of a dentist on the ground floor. At the top of the stairs, a heavy gray door opened onto a long narrow hallway, with a couple of rooms on either side: bathroom and kitchen on the left, two small bedrooms on the right, one of them shared by the Shmeruks' two daughters.

At the end of the hallway was Khone's book-lined study, which also doubled as the living room, or salon. This was where he conducted his weekly graduate seminars and did his work. Photos of grandparents looked down from the walls. During most of our visits, the room would be filled with guests: old friends from Poland who had settled in Tokyo or Paris, Yiddish writers, scholars from

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abroad, local colleagues. The conversation went off in all directions, to the past and future, to Russia and America. After a couple of hours, Mira would place little tables through the room so we could comfortably take our tea with her abundant and excellent desserts. As with so many Israelis I was coming to know, the Shmeruks' hospitality seemed an expression of their Zionism, providing a home within the homeland.

I recall, perhaps oddly, a pang of regret I felt at being part of this marvelous circle. The regret was not for myself, but for my teacher Max Weinreich in New York, whose loneliness had been made palpable to me when I began studying with him in 1960. Thirty-five years earlier, as a dynamic young scholar, Max Weinreich had succeeded in winning community support for the establishment of the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research in Vilna. Within a decade, he had helped to shape YIVO into something resembling a Jewish university, with "departments" devoted to history, linguistics, literature, and folklore, economics and statistics, and psychology and education, each engaged in active research and publication. YIVO had also established a branch in New York, and when Weinreich managed to reach the United States at the start of World War II, he turned that branch into the new center.

In New York, Weinreich's plan was to train a few good doctoral students each year; these learned few, he felt, might change the face of American Jewry. With that goal in mind, he sought permission from the New York Board of Regents to award graduate degrees at YIVO. But he could not persuade his own board of directors to support the project. His discouragement gradually seeped into other areas. When his four-volume *History of the Yiddish Language* was in its final stages of preparation, he said he did not know why anyone troubled to publish the work since there were not ten people in the world who would read it.

Max Weinreich also told me that, in 1950, he had been invited to teach Yiddish at the Hebrew University. When I asked him why he declined, he replied that having contributed nothing to the development of Israel—as an ideologically serious Bundist, his opposition to Zionism was a matter of record—he could not accept its bounty. But whether personal honor or another form of hesitation dictated his decision, he probably came to rue it. In Israel, research into Yiddish language and literature was booming, and if the idea of a secular Jewish culture had any chance of being realized, it was certainly there.

Both Weinreich and Shmeruk had fought on the same side in the language war—Yiddish or Hebrew?—that split many Jewish communities in the 1930's. In that war, the choice of language stood for much more profound differences: between those who believed that Jews would flourish in the modern world as a secular minority among the nations, and those who believed there was no longer any alternative to Jewish national sovereignty in one homeland. The destruction of European Jewry and the flow of refugees to Israel resolved this quarrel once and for all. Weinreich had fallen casualty to it. Shmeruk, by contrast, appeared to have survived by, paradoxically, coming to the country where Hebrew had decisively triumphed. This, at any rate, was their own judgment, though Weinreich was unduly harsh in his self-assessment: he did inspire a number of young American Jews to devote their lives to Yiddish, the most notable being his own son Uriel, who pioneered Yiddish studies as chairman of the linguistics department at Columbia. A half-year after his death in 1969, YIVO partially fulfilled Max Weinreich's dream by establishing a center for advanced Jewish studies in his name.

FOR HIS part, Shmeruk put linguistic ideology behind him. He took an open, hospitable approach, both personally and in his scholarly demeanor. With guests, he invariably adjusted the conversation to the most limited linguist in the group. In the same spirit, he taught his university classes in Hebrew, so that advanced students from other disciplines could participate. He published, and encouraged his students to publish, in either Yiddish, Hebrew, or English, and to translate whenever feasible into other languages. He was also the first to encourage young German scholars who were interested in Old Yiddish. Transcending the ideological principles that had once fueled his own passion, he would not allow ancient quarrels to drain energies from the real work to be done.

This is not to say that the language wars were over. Shmeruk's attitude drew abuse from professional nostalgists. The founder of a Yiddish program at a rival school contended that using Hebrew as the language of instruction was a slight to Yiddish, and the Hebrew University duly received complaints about the "damage" being done by its stellar department. In addition, although Shmeruk tried to keep up good relations with various organizations for the propagation of Yiddish, his attention to scholarship was often slandered as a form of elitism. After one particularly unhappy venture into a public forum, he wrote me that he regretted

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every moment he had wasted on "*tumlenishn un farzorgeray*," on boosterism and drumming up support; he said he lacked the social talent for this kind of activity.

Nevertheless, he did become a public figure, on his own terms. In the wake of the Six-Day War of 1967, a new group of Yiddish writers arrived in Israel. Among them were refugees from Poland who had been newly purged by the Communist regime, as well as the first trickle allowed to leave the Soviet Union. The Shmeruk home came to seem a subdivision of the state's absorption agency, with everyone applying for advice and jobs. Having lived under terribly difficult conditions during his own first years as an immigrant in Israel, Khone was not too sympathetic to the demands of some of the newcomers for apartments larger than his own. But he tried to find what employment he could for them in various projects he had helped to launch. These included a research center for the study of Polish Jewry; variorum editions of the works of Mendele Mocher Sforim and Sholem Aleichem; an annotated bibliography of the Yiddish press; an annotated bibliography of Yiddish publications from the 16th to the 18th century; and various projects devoted to the study of Yiddish culture in Russia. As Israel continued to gather in refugees from Eastern Europe, Shmeruk helped to make the country the cultural repository of the East European Jewish past.

IT IS common to speak of successive "waves" of immigration to Israel, but Khone's life reminds me of the undertow beneath the waves. During the many years that he played an important role at the university, and basked in the achievements of his daughters and six grandsons, he appeared to be the poster-perfect Israeli. With his rugged, handsome face, and deep, cigarette-stained voice, he even looked and sounded the part. His infectious energy made it easy to forget how much he himself had lost.

The rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland at the end of the 1970's brought about a dramatic change in Polish-Jewish relations, and it seemed only natural that Khone Shmeruk, as one of the most active scholars in this area, should find himself at the center of new political as well as cultural initiatives between the two countries. Polish liberals who dreamed of throwing off the Soviet yoke were becoming pro-Israel for different reasons. Israel had demonstrated its strength by defeating Soviet client states in the Six-Day War, and the sight of Soviet weaponry destroyed by the Jews—a people famously more vulnerable even than the Poles—served as an inspiration. Then, too, enough time had passed since the Holocaust for a certain guilt to surface toward the Jews, particularly as there were almost none left in Poland to complicate the simple image of their martyrdom.

Embedded in these considerations was another impulse that affected Shmeruk directly. Polish academics were well aware of the important role played by the Jews in their country's history and culture, and of the dearth of researchers trained in Jewish sources. Thus, when Shmeruk organized the first trip of Israeli scholars to Poland in 1983, he was warmly received by historians there. From then on, his advice was sought at ever higher levels and with ever greater respect.

What this meant to Khone can hardly be imagined. Students who accompanied him on that first trip reported they could not keep up with him as he ran through the streets of Warsaw to show them the sites of his youth. I can attest to this excitement as one fortunate enough to have been included in the second such trip he led in 1986. One morning he marched us to Franciszkanska Street, where a childhood neighbor had shown him how to "read" the cobblestoned entryways to the courtyards of their former homes, now incorporated into the pavement. He counted from the corner to find the entryway to No. 10.

Shmeruk's sentimental tour was laced with some anger. In Krasinski Park, he showed us the pond where he used to skate and the hill where he sledded, but then pointed out how the Poles had extended the park and the street into what had once been Nalevki, the heart of the Jewish sector. Suddenly one knew that the meticulous care Shmeruk took in his scholarship to fix every date and track down every reference was bound up with this pursuit of his own past, of which nothing remained but what the historian could reconstruct.

I have described that trip before, and it was actually as a consequence of my article about it in these pages ("Poland's Jewish Ghosts," January 1987) that Khone's manner toward me cooled. I, too, was thrilled by the rise of Polish liberalism, and drawn by powerful emotions to the Polish home of my parents and ancestors. It was stirring to explore the physical landscape where so much of Yiddish literature had been created. But in my article I also noted the presence of what I called "the phantom limb"—an anti-Semitism that continued to make its presence felt in Poland long after the Jews had been physically excised from the country. While it was important that Jews protect the visible memory of

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their past, and promote scholarly exchanges as Shmeruk was doing, I believed they should not ignore the anti-Jewish cast of modern Polish nationalism, including its present-day variety.

Khone did not appreciate my cautionary approach, any more than a lover wants to hear about his sweetheart's failings. His critical attention was shifting, from the internal contacts between Yiddish and Hebrew to relations between Jewish and non-Jewish literatures, Polish in particular. I did not understand the import of his growing interest, or recognize its every facet. One of them was this: he had fallen in love with a Polish Christian woman, Krystyna Bevis, who shot the documentary film of our trip, and shortly after the death of his wife in 1989 he married her, and she bore him a son. He named the boy Avigdor, after his father.

WHEN SHMERUK officially retired from the Hebrew University in 1989, he began to divide his time between Warsaw and Jerusalem, teaching and guiding research in both places but with the stronger pull coming from Europe. How many reasons, in addition to the fact of his new family, one might offer for his attraction to Poland! He would certainly not have been the first Israeli to chafe at the constrictions of a tight society, or to leap at the opportunity to spend time abroad. Cut off for so many years, he now had access to Poland's archives and its scholars. A lifelong teacher, he welcomed the chance to pioneer Yiddish studies in a new country: he could do as much, if not more, to protect the Jewish past in Poland by training Polish students in Jewish research as by preparing students for the task in Israel. Jews habitually visit *keyver oves*, ancestral graves; is it not understandable that Khone Shmeruk, who left his family one day in 1939, should have wanted to forge a link with his martyred parents in Poland?

But I think it was also the enticement of life, not death, that drew Khone so powerfully to Poland: the allure of his interrupted youth, when he was just starting out as a historian with all his years ahead of him. One night during our 1986 trip I returned with Khone from a performance at the Yiddish theater. We were strolling along a tree-lined street (Grzybowska, I believe), and Khone said, "This is where I used to walk with girls in the evening when I was a student." Before there was a professor of Yiddish there had been a young man who felt the promise of romance and the prospect of greatness and who adored the complications of his city. Now that Poland was free again, what was to prevent that man from starting all over, in the city of his youth, in the university that had once humiliated him; what was to prevent him from creating a new Polish-Jewish symbiosis in his own person?

One of Shmeruk's most interesting and far-reaching studies concerns the legend of Esterke, which exists in both Polish and Yiddish versions. Obviously based on the biblical book of Esther, the story tells how the Polish king Casimir the Great (1310-70) fell in love with a Jewish maiden and took her for his mistress. This tale has served as a litmus test for perceptions of Polish-Jewish relations. To Polish anti-Semites, the king's out-of-wedlock liaison with a Jewish concubine has long been a reminder of the perils lurking in their country's hospitality to the Jews. To philo-Semites, especially in the 19th century, it seemed to confirm the generosity of native Polish impulses.

What interested Shmeruk was something else: the unequal way the story developed in Polish and Yiddish literature. Whereas modern Yiddish writers were aware of and responded to the various Polish versions of the legend, Polish writers in general paid scant attention to the Yiddish. Shmeruk's study interprets this as still another paradigm for the inequality at the heart of Polish-Jewish relations. But his study itself, simply by virtue of existing, establishes a connection between the two cultures that the cultures had failed to make, and consummates a kind of union between two peoples otherwise doomed to remain apart.

Khone must have felt uniquely qualified to help bring about a new rapprochement between Poles and Jews. While Poland was still under Soviet occupation, he had extended many invitations to Polish academics to attend conferences in Jerusalem, making "the West" available under the auspices of Jewish studies. Now that Israel was strong and free, the Jew could return to Poland not as a supplicant but as a benefactor, bringing Western know-how to a society that had stagnated under Communism. Perhaps he even wanted to play out the Esterke romance in reverse, as the munificent Jew coming to the rescue of the Polish maiden.

If so, however, this is not how it felt to those he left behind. During the last stages of his illness, when he deliberately flew from Jerusalem to Poland because that is where he wished to be buried, he imprinted a wound on the hearts of his countrymen. I cannot speak for his daughters, his colleagues, or his students, but I know how his attraction to Poland affected our own relations over the past decade, and how a sense of rejection has compounded my grief. In effect, everything that his postwar life, the land of

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Israel, and scholarly achievement had brought him could not replace what he had lost in Warsaw. His life also reminds us that, even in the newly constituted Jewish commonwealth, Jewish dreams of exogamy, in both the personal and cultural sense, are not soon likely to fade.

BUT THIS brings me to the other and by far happier "homecoming": the opening in June of the National Yiddish Book Center. In this case, the man behind the event is a young American, Aaron Lansky, who was born and raised in Massachusetts and, after being introduced to Yiddish in an undergraduate course at Hampshire College, went on in the mid-1970's to pursue a master's degree in Yiddish literature at McGill University in Montreal, where I was then teaching.

Like all advanced Yiddish students, Aaron soon discovered that there was no place to purchase or exchange books. Teachers might try, as I did, to borrow texts from the few Yiddish readers of their acquaintance, or resort to photocopying poems, stories, even entire novels. Alas, a literature program based exclusively on stapled photocopies is a flimsy thing, no matter how substantial the words on the page.

But Aaron also soon discovered that there were actually thousands upon thousands of Yiddish books available if one knew where to look for them. Elderly or widowed Jews relocating to smaller apartments were often keen to give away their libraries, as were children no longer able to decipher the language of their deceased parents. A student with access to a car could pick up treasures for the asking.

It was this juxtaposition of students without books and books without homes that launched Aaron on the project to which he has since devoted his life. First on his own, next with other volunteers, and ultimately through an organization he created, he collected books from Montreal, New York, the rest of the United States and Canada, and then from Israel, South America, even Cuba. He found suitable space to store the collection, then streamlined the processes of cataloguing and of making the books available for distribution. From this initiative grew ancillary programs: summer training sessions for student interns, start-up Yiddish classes, weekend seminars, a popular journal, a broadcast series of Yiddish short stories on National Public Radio, and so forth. He also saw to it that the books would begin once again to circulate in the world, including in the form of basic collections for university libraries.

As the collection grew to over a million volumes, necessitating several moves from one warehousing facility to another, Aaron and his board decided to construct a permanent home. He first leased a landmark property from the town of Amherst for the symbolic annual sum of one dollar; later, he won almost equally generous terms from Mount Holyoke College; finally he purchased ten acres from his alma mater, Hampshire College, also located in Amherst, for a center to be integrated with the academic program of the school.

The new building, architecturally evocative of the wooden synagogues of Eastern Europe, is the most beautiful, and certainly the most carefully designed, dwelling place that Yiddish has ever had. But I would go farther: the National Yiddish Book Center must be the most exciting new venture in American Jewish institutional life at least since the founding of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in 1954. In the same way that AIPAC identified a problem—the need to protect Israel from Arab assault—and used American lobbying methods to advance its purpose, the National Yiddish Book Center has enlisted the American spirit to help save the Yiddish heritage.

Although Aaron has publicly credited me with suggesting that he situate himself not in a big city, where he would be perceived by entrenched institutions as a competitor, but in the New England area that he knows best, the truth is that I have learned a lot from this young man about the potential of good ideas joined to an entrepreneurial imagination. Watching his team at work, I am sometimes reminded of the story about the New York hasidic peddler, in his long black coat and earlocks, who goes forth to sell his wares in small towns of the South. Surrounded one day by a flock of curious children, he stares them down: "Vat's de medder mit you? You never seen a *yenkee* before?" But the funny thing about this Hasid is that he *was* behaving like a Yankee. Jews are never more American than when they show initiative on their own behalf. All that Aaron was able to accomplish for the Yiddish Book Center derives from his pride and pleasure in growing up Jewish in New England.

TO BE sure, the Amherst of Aaron's student years was not the Amherst of Emily Dickinson. At least initially, what influenced his attraction to Yiddish was as much the campus culture of the 60's as the puritan or pioneering spirit of his native region. One is reminded here of another witticism, this one by Ronald Reagan, who, when asked whether he had ever visited a Communist country,

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replied, "No. But I've been to Massachusetts." If the early postwar years had encouraged pride in a strong America and, among Jews, in the new and resilient state of Israel, by the late 1960's the student movement was idealizing anti-American revolutionaries like Che Guevara and applauding the Arab war against the Jewish state as part of the struggle against bourgeois imperialism.

Among some Jewish students, this atmosphere bred, rather peculiarly, an attraction to Yiddish. They saw it, sentimentally, as the language of Jewish socialism and of Jewish poverty, hence acceptable in the recycled leftist terms of the day. Young Jews protesting against corporate America or against the so-called imperialist war in Vietnam; young Jews forming an identification with victimhood; even young Jews in revolt against their own "patriarchal" religious civilization imagined they could find in Yiddish and in "*Yiddishkayt*" an alternative and wholly innocent mode of identity.

Khone Shmeruk, reflecting on his own youthful Yiddishism, once noted the appeal to many modern Jews of "lost causes." He used the English phrase to designate that gray area between involuntary failure and the voluntary preference for powerlessness. My own awareness that students were being drawn to Yiddish as an emblem of political martyrdom coincided with Aaron Lansky's years of study at McGill.

What is objectionable about associating Yiddish with lost causes? For one thing, as Shmeruk rightly perceived, it represents a perversion of historical truth. Yiddish first came into being in Europe as the vernacular of a religious Jewry that was so very cohesive and culturally autonomous that it could generate a language of its own even while living alongside and interacting with speakers of other languages. Indeed, Yiddish could have come into being *only* as the language of a religious civilization: without the need for a separate calendar, kitchen, judicial courts, and customs, Jews would have had no reason to create or to maintain a separate tongue.

It is true that, in interwar Poland, a Yiddish culture thrived that was largely secular, and also that nonreligious Jews there were slower to take up the majority language of their country than were their counterparts in Russia, Western Europe, or the United States. But that was mostly because their citizenship was being cruelly curtailed. The Yiddishism of the youthful Max Weinreich and Khone Shmeruk was a means of deflecting Polish anti-Semitism by raising Jewish national consciousness; it had its counterpart in an equally militant Polish Zionism, and a reinvigorated Orthodoxy. Had they been welcomed as citizens, most secular Polish Jews would have chosen to become full participants in Polish culture. And had Jews been able to gain the political entry they sought in Poland through their many vying parties, they would have become rich, powerful, and famous instead of remaining oppressed and poor.

These days, Jewish (and non-Jewish) spokesmen for gays and lesbians, feminists and neo-Trotskyites freely identify their sense of personal injury with the cause of Yiddish. They thereby commit a double fault, occluding the moral assurance and tenacity of Yiddish culture in its own terms and, by attributing value to weakness, retroactively defaming the Jewish will to live and to prosper. A student who seeks in this debased image of Yiddish a substitute for Jewish civilization as a whole not only traduces the past but can become, himself, a caricature.

NO ONE is more aware of these conundrums than Aaron Lansky and his young staff at the National Yiddish Book Center. Their task is not simple, for the founding purpose of the center—namely, the rescue of unwanted books—testifies to the failure of a secular Jewish culture in the Yiddish language: had it been possible to sustain such a culture, these books would still be sitting proudly in the homes of readers. How will the center deal honestly with the hollowness of secular Jewishness if it draws its main support from a nostalgia for that hollowness?

When asked whether he was going to attend the dedication of the new building, my brother David Roskies, who teaches Yiddish literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, said, "Of course. If I couldn't be at the opening of the YIVO in Vilna in 1925, I can at least attend the opening of the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst." This lovely formulation offers a framework for continuity with the past of the kind American Jews so badly need. But the analogy between Vilna and Amherst also brings into bolder relief the latent challenges to Amherst.

For example, at the opening of the center there were mistakes in a Yiddish sign and in the few Yiddish phrases with which some participants sprinkled their speeches. Mistakes are surely correctable, and any non-native speaker is likely to make them, but they signify that not even the champions of Yiddish culture in America are truly at home in the language, and this in a civilization that has historically prided itself on literacy and intellectual achievement. In the Poland of Khone Shmeruk,

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guardians of Yiddish set themselves the highest possible linguistic standards, in part to counteract the generally low repute in which Yiddish was held by the cultured classes. It is clearly much harder to do this in America. Indeed, since American culture at large is so indifferent to standards of excellence, the temptation to make do with mediocrity will be almost irresistible in a field where ignorance rules.

The National Yiddish Book Center, being a popular facility, geared the opening of its new building to *amkho*, "the people," rather than to a cultural elite. Whereas the YIVO ceremonies in Vilna were conducted in Yiddish by the greatest historians and scholars of the day, the Amherst ceremony included not even token representation from the fields of contemporary Yiddish literature and scholarship. The novelist Chava Rosenfarb happened to be present in the audience, but she was not introduced to the audience or asked to speak. This was consonant with the "outward" rather than "inward" nature of the ceremonies: a Yiddish speaker would not have been understood by the vast majority of the audience, and a speech from within the Yiddish world would have brought something "alien" to this American event. In essence, the opening ceremonies thereby confirmed that Yiddish in America is a contradiction in terms, and that, for its part, Yiddish comes alive only when it serves the particular needs of a particular community.

Of course, Yiddish-speaking communities *do* exist and thrive in the United States. What is more, their demographic vitality testifies much more powerfully to the blessings of American pluralism than does the National Yiddish Book Center, or any other American Jewish institution. The trouble is, the bearded hasidic Jews of Kiryas Joel or of Boro Park in Brooklyn have no interest in the secular Yiddish tradition that is on display at the center, or in retrieving the books generated by that tradition. They would say, rather, that the discarded volumes are the logical consequence of the secularized culture that produced them, or, worse, that when language ceases to be a vehicle for the service of God, it becomes an instrument of idolatry.

Still other complexities were evoked by the opening ceremonies in Amherst. In one inadvertently suggestive gesture, the rabbi who pronounced the prayer of thanksgiving was a representative of the Reform movement, the German-based branch of American Judaism that historically was the most distant from Yiddish and the most hostile to its tribal sense of nationalism. Having lost its own universalizing heritage in America, Reform has clearly begun to feel at home with a Yiddish that is now mostly ethnic coloration.

The irony of this particular inversion would not have been lost on Yiddishists of an earlier generation. "*Beser a bord on a rov eyder a rov on a bord*," Jews used to quip when religion began to lose its reflexive authority and they could no longer count on knowing who was who: better a beard without a rabbi than a rabbi without a beard. This expressed preference for an untutored traditional Jew over an educated modern one took fully into account the often rewarding tensions between the old and the new. But today the Jews of Boro Park are too intent on staving off secular influence to enjoy the twilight zone between faith and skepticism, and as for most secular Jews, they possess so little of the Jewish heritage that they can hardly appreciate its paradoxes.

BUT I do not mean to close on so grim a note. Problems and all, it is a wonderful thing to celebrate Jewish creativity in a beautiful new building, in a warm and welcoming environment. Yiddish, especially, deserves a haven other than in cemeteries. Though there is more than enough terror and tragedy inside the books that crowd the shelves of the National Yiddish Book Center, in their new setting one is reminded that they also contain funds of delight, beauty and humor, wisdom and love.

In the latest issue of the center's quarterly magazine, *Pakn Treger* ("Back Packer"), Aaron Lansky answers his own query, "How do we revive Jewish literature?" with the answer, "Only by reviving Jewish life." Perhaps, indeed, the new guardians of the Yiddish legacy will be able to harness some of the sentiment surrounding their project and direct it toward the serious study of the demanding and particularistic civilization that brought Yiddish into being. That path may certainly begin with a visit to the National Yiddish Book Center. It may even begin with a visit to the Jewish cemetery on Okapowa Street in Warsaw, where lies my much-loved friend and mentor Khone Shmeruk. Only, it had better not end there.

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Greenhouse Politics

Jeremy Rabkin

NEXT MONTH, world leaders will convene in Kyoto, Japan, to address the issue of global warming. The European Union (EU) has proposed that the developed countries commit themselves to dramatically reducing emissions of those gases thought to be responsible for trapping heat in the earth's atmosphere. The Clinton administration favors a more "flexible approach," but it too has insisted that a massive response is urgently needed, and in an elaborately staged campaign to mobilize public opinion, it has made common cause with militant environmentalists and advocacy groups like the Union of Concerned Scientists to trumpet the imminent threat to life on earth. In an alarmist speech on July 24, President Clinton warned:

> [I]f we fail to act, scientists expect that our seas will rise one to three feet, and thousands of square miles . . . will be flooded. Infectious diseases will spread to new regions. Severe heat waves will claim lives. Agriculture will suffer. Severe droughts and floods will be more common.

This international mobilization presents a real paradox. Five years ago, when similarly loud alarms were sounded at the much-publicized "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro, the assembled statesmen did little more than note the putative hazard without committing any country to undertake any particular action. Nor, in the years since Rio, has the problem of global warming been thought to have grown worse—quite the contrary. What, then, accounts for the newfound determination to act *now*?

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THE THEORY behind global warming holds that emissions from automobiles and industrial activity will reduce the rate at which heat from the sun is reflected back into space from the earth's surface. Acting like the glass panes in a greenhouse roof, these accumulating "greenhouse gases" will produce a gradual rise in average global temperatures.

By the mid-1980's, scientists had developed computer models suggesting that a doubling of atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, the primary greenhouse gas, would increase the mean global temperature by nearly 6 degrees celsius by the year 2050, with an increase perhaps three times greater at polar latitudes. Warming on this scale might induce melting of the polar ice caps, causing sea levels to rise and the consequent flooding of low-lying regions. There was also speculation about major disruptions in weather patterns, leading to terrible droughts in some areas and devastating storms elsewhere.

Relying on such forecasts, the 1988 Toronto Conference on the Changing Atmosphere warned that increasing emissions might have consequences "second only to global nuclear war." In the wake of this gathering, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program organized a new body of scientists and governmental

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representatives, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), to clarify the sources of the peril and to propose ways to mitigate it.

Given its origins and composition, the IPCC was under considerable pressure to dramatize the problem. And so, for a while, it did, providing, for example, many of the scary data behind the 1992 Rio summit.* All the more impressive, then, that in the intervening years the IPCC has reported the doubts that have been cast on these findings and has revised its projections accordingly.

Data obtained from satellites, for example, demonstrate that while the troposphere—the layer of air extending from the earth's surface to a height of seven kilometers—has shown a good deal of temperature variability over the past eighteen years, there has been no net warming; if anything, there may have been a slight *cooling* of the atmosphere in this period. The variations themselves, moreover, may be attributable as much to natural occurrences, including volcanic eruptions and solar flares, as to man-made emissions. The fact is that the earth's average temperature tends to fluctuate not only over decades but over centuries, while our own century as a whole has been warmer than the last, the shift is not out of line with previous fluctuations. Finally, most of the 20th-century increase took place in the years *before* World War II—before, that is, the unprecedented upward spurt in worldwide industrial activity from whose effects we are allegedly suffering.

In light of these data, the IPCC has begun to scale back prior estimates, sometimes starkly. Where, for example, the Toronto Conference predicted that sea levels might rise 5 feet by the year 2030, the IPCC now puts the figure at 1.25 feet; where the Toronto Conference looked for warming of 6 degrees celsius by the middle of the 21st century, the IPCC's 1995 report forecast a warming of only 1 to 3.5 degrees.

A number of scientists maintain that even these revised projections overestimate the danger and contain an exaggerated view of "climate sensitivity" to the build-up of carbon dioxide. There remains, in fact, vigorous debate over whether human activity has had *any* substantial effect on climatic change. Cautiously, the IPCC's 1995 assessment concludes only that "the balance of the evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate"—a far cry from its own earlier pronouncements, let alone from predictions of damage on a scale "second only to global nuclear war."

BUT RECEDING concern among those in a position to know the facts is only one part of the puzzle in the current push for far-reaching reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions. Equally curious is that the push continues in the face of mounting evidence that the proposed program has no realistic chance of attaining its objectives.

Carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas, is an inevitable by-product of burning fossil fuel, in turn the principal source of energy for industrial activity. Some economists insist that we in the United States could achieve relatively painless reductions in energy consumption by improving efficiency; but theirs is hardly the mainstream view. The most plausible studies predict that adhering to the EU's emission-reduction proposals would shear two or three percentage points from our GNP. In other words, the U.S. would suffer an economic shock on a par with what we endured at the hands of the OPEC oil cartel in the 1970's. Even if we were foolish enough to embark on such a course, it seems improbable we would stay with it.

But our own future conduct is hardly the only question mark. Two billion people, more than a third of the earth's population, currently live without access to electric power. Simply to bring the most basic of modern amenities to this enormous population will entail a huge increase in energy consumption and therefore in carbon-dioxide emissions. To restrict this development is inevitably to freeze the standard of living of billions of people at wretched levels—a morally questionable proposition to say the least.

Nor is this an issue that the industrialized countries are in a position to decide on their own. No matter what restrictions *they* may agree to at Kyoto, there is simply no way to ensure compliance in the industrializing world.

Take, for example, China, a country whose tremendous economic growth has been fueled largely by coal, the dirtiest of all energy sources and the one that releases the most carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. China today faces a whole host of environmental problems: a quarter of the country's population does not have access to safe drinking water; air pollution is at appalling levels; huge areas of the countryside are ecological disaster zones. A government that is doing next to nothing to ameliorate these problems is not likely to agree to a stiff price for combating global warming, a problem that may—or may not—begin to materialize 100 years hence.

China, in fact, has taken the lead in forging a coalition of states bent on *opposing* any international regime of emission controls for developing

* For an account, see Jeffrey Salmon, "Greenhouse Anxiety," COMMENTARY, July 1993.

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countries. These countries reject the idea that they should be required to forgo industrialization while the rich nations of the world reap the benefits of their own past despoliation of the environment. So far, the developed countries have agreed to take the lead, while expressing the hope that the less-developed will join them later on. But any reductions undertaken by the former will be more than offset by increasing industrial activity among the latter.

WHY, THEN, to ask the question again, are the Europeans and the Clinton administration so insistent on moving ahead? The answer is partly the same in the two cases and partly different.

The part that is the same has to do with the enormous political pressure exerted by the environmentalist movement, which is actually stronger in Europe than in the U.S. But in Europe other factors intervene as well. There, the most vociferous advocates of emission cutbacks are Britain and Germany, and the plain truth is that both these countries have something to gain from a strict environmentalist regime—particularly if the reduction of greenhouse gases is set, as the EU proposes, at 15 percent below 1990 levels.

In Britain, 1990 was a crucial year, marking the culmination of Margaret Thatcher's war against coal—a war undertaken not for environmentalist reasons but to tame the radical miners' union and to take advantage of Great Britain's newly developed fields of natural gas in the North Sea. In 1990, Thatcher's government privatized electricity production and encouraged the new private utilities to switch from coal to natural gas. Having thus already made changes that reduce overall carbon-dioxide emissions, Britain would enjoy a considerable advantage over countries only now required to bring levels down to below the 1990 baseline. No wonder that Margaret Thatcher's successors, John Major and now Tony Blair, have been promoting a policy that promises to work to their country's economic benefit, while earning as well the universal applause of environmentalists.

Germany presents a similar story of environmentalism (in the form of the influential Green party) working hand in hand with self-interest. There, too, the year 1990 marked a sharp turning point. German reunification in that year led to radical transformations in the economic life of what had been the Communist-controlled German Democratic Republic (GDR). Entire industries were shut down, creating vast unemployment but also leading to an abrupt fall-off in energy consumption. In those industries that survived, Bonn encouraged a transition from the filthy brown coal favored by the GDR to cleaner and more efficient fuels. The transition was economically painful, but now a payoff looms ahead: if its competitors are forced to undertake substitutions and cut-backs on the scale it has already absorbed, Germany stands to benefit.

And the United States? Here, alas, we see the operation not so much of economic self-interest, enlightened or otherwise, as of ideological zeal mixed with crass politics. A Vice President, Al Gore, who has declared that automobiles pose a threat "more deadly than that of any military enemy we are ever again likely to confront," and a President who enthusiastically endorsed the goals of the Rio conference five years ago and remains eager to court the "green" constituency, are the perfect candidates for an international agreement that, evidence or no evidence, sounds all the right environmentalist notes.

But there are surely other calculations in the administration's thinking as well. An agreement may offer international cover for controversial new regulations being proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency that aim further to reduce air pollution. Similarly, a global-warming scare may make it easier to pass additional energy taxes, and perhaps to curb the enthusiasm of Americans for private commuting and big cars. And then there is the administration's predilection for large-scale multilateral projects that generate lots of media attention and create an impression of serious statesmanship on the world stage.

The U.S. Senate has already voted 95-0 to oppose any agreement that does "substantial harm to the U.S. economy" and that does not bring the developing countries under its terms. The administration may hope that once restrictions are presented as a measure to which all the advanced nations are fully committed—and to which other nations have offered some token endorsement—it will be possible to portray skeptics as troglodytes bent on protecting profits at the expense of life on earth, and thus to override congressional resistance. But, in a familiar enough pattern, the White House may also be perfectly content in the end to coopt the arguments of its opponents, taking credit both for the sincerity of its environmentalist convictions and for its attentiveness to the needs of the American economy.

The leaders of the European Union have substantial, venal reasons for going to Kyoto. American policy-makers also have their reasons, a stew of utopian rhetoric and partisan calculation. Thus does the political problem of global warming intensify even as the climatic danger itself evanesces.

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The Stain on Vanessa Stephen's Dress

Elizabeth Powers

LIKE THE prodigiously endowed child in Charles Baudelaire's prose poem, "The Gifts of the Fairies," Virginia Woolf came into the world in 1882 with the touch of distinction on her. Her father, Leslie Stephen, eloquent agnostic, historian of ideas, and biographer, was among the most eminent of the British Victorians. Besides overseeing the first 26 volumes of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, for which he wrote some of the most important articles, Stephen was a renowned alpinist who recounted his exploits in *The Playground of Europe* (1871).

The paternal, Stephen, side of Virginia's inheritance was altogether very respectable, counting the Wilberforces, Venns, Macaulays, and other enlightened Victorians among its associates and relations. On the maternal side, what was lacking in middle-class solidity was made up for in charm and ease and aesthetic interests. Young Virginia and her elder sister Vanessa inherited their looks, a characteristic Victorian type captured in the romantic photographs of a great-aunt, Julia Margaret Cameron, from their mother, who, it was said, sat as the Virgin for the pre-Raphaelite painter Burne-Jones.

From earliest childhood on, Woolf herself enjoyed an association with books and men of ideas that ordinary mortals might only regard with longing; there can be no doubt that this childhood experience lies behind the wounded sense of entitlement which pervades the opening sections of her most famous essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in which the plain gravy soup and custard-with-prunes available at the poorly endowed women's colleges of Oxbridge are set off against the partridge and patterned plates of the more established men's colleges. Here, as an example of her precocity, are some entries from her diary in 1897, when she was fifteen: "Father and I went for a walk along the Parade. He told me stories of [the historian Thomas Babington] Macaulay; and various old gentlemen whom he had known"; "Father recited [Matthew Arnold's] *Sohrab and Rustum* after dinner"; "Father did not read after dinner. I managed to finish the 7th volume of [Sir Walter] Scott, to begin and finish the 8th volume and to begin the ninth volume."

In the same period she worked her way through Macaulay's five-volume *History of England*, while another entry mentions "gnawing my way through the 18th century." By 1905, she was translating Sophocles, Homer, Aristotle, and Virgil ("Rather a lazy morning. . . . I read a bit of Latin [,] the Georgics . . . stately and melodious; but without the vitality of my dear old Greeks").

Such an apprenticeship served Virginia well when she began writing book reviews and literary essays in 1904-5, though not every young, aspiring

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writer also had easy access to the pages of the London *Times Literary Supplement*. Her first novel, The *Voyage Out*, appeared in 1915, while the fiction she wrote from the 1920's on—*Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*—has placed her in the firmament of modernist masters.

And yet, despite these achievements—including essays that are, in my opinion, among the most felicitous in the English language—Virginia Woolf died a suicide in 1941. What had happened to the child of good fortune that she most certainly seemed to be at her birth?

THE FAMILY tree reveals sufficient evidence of madness, melancholy, and mental affliction, most proximately in her half-sister Laura, daughter by Leslie Stephen's first marriage to Minny Thackeray. But ever since the academic industry specializing in Virginia Woolf got into full gear, both her life and the depression that led her to take that life have increasingly been seen in a different light: as a struggle against the very literary and cultural patrimony of which she was, as we have seen, so striking a beneficiary. In turn, Woolf's writings have become foundational documents of the critique of the so-called patriarchy.

In order to appreciate Virginia Woolf's own attitude toward that institution—and to evaluate a new biography of her by the English academic Hermione Lee*—it may be useful to compare two very different accounts Woolf herself wrote about her father at two different moments in her active literary life. The first is an essay written after her father's death for inclusion in F.W. Maitland's *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (1906). It dwells with obvious fondness on the literary richness of the Stephen household—her father reading aloud to the children, his prodigious memory for poetry. Meant for public consumption, the essay is naturally judicious; it is clear from it that Woolf, anointed as the judge of her father's tastes, has donned his literary mantle as well.

The second essay, "A Sketch of the Past," a memoir of her childhood and adolescence, was written at the end of Woolf's own life, in 1939 and 1940. The feelings it describes about both her parents are now very complex, and those concerning her father display all the unresolvable issues that a strong-willed child feels toward a dominating parent, particularly one who was thrown into a slough of despond when he found himself a widower, for a second time, at the age of sixty-three. (Virginia herself was thirteen at the time of her mother's death, while her young brother Adrian was six.)

For feminist students of Woolf, as for Hermione Lee in her biography, it is this latter image of the self-centered Victorian paterfamilias, here representing the universal male tendency to turn women into slaves, that serves as the necessary conceptual framework for a proper understanding of the author's life and writings. Here is Lee's hamfisted way of putting things:

> Virginia Woolf built her political analysis of her culture on her experience of her childhood. The father's dominant needs, the sacrifice of the mother and the unmarried daughters to the tyranny of the family, the prejudicial economy which spent money on sending boys to school and university and kept daughters at home, where the system of lessons kept her "uneducated," the censorious jurisdiction of grandmothers and aunts, . . . the hypocrisy and censorship which kept the daughters ignorant of sex: these would be the items, for life, on her political agenda.

Generally, it is true, Lee does not engage in such bald summations. Her method, instead, is postmodernist, depicting Woolf's writing as a means of "composing the self." Thus, she opens her biography not with the "facts," with Virginia's birth or with her forebears, but with a 1905 return visit by the four grown Stephen siblings to St. Ives, a Cornish village on the southwest coast of England where the family had earlier spent its summer vacations. Though Woolf's diary entries on the visit reveal little nostalgia, Lee asserts that the reminiscence and yearning that permeated it would later be captured in *To the Lighthouse*, where the fictional setting refers back to St. Ives and all that was lost with the death of Virginia's mother.

Even the interior of the Stephen family house in London is described by Lee in terms of its rebirth in Woolf's 1937 novel, *The Years*. Similarly, Lee asserts that Virginia's older brother, Thoby, who died at twenty-six, "the brother she was always trying to know better," is "re-imagined" in three different versions—"as 'Jacob' in *Jacob's Room*, as 'Percival' in *The Waves*, and as himself in . . . 'Sketch of the Past'"—and also takes on additional freight by representing males who are "absent, obscure, and silent."

The consequence of this deducing of the subject's inner life from her art is that Lee's biography has all the vague and unfelt quality of Virginia Woolf's novels themselves. As anyone can attest who has slogged his way through these works of

* *Virginia Woolf*. Knopf, 893 pp., $39.95.

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fiction, the one thing that is absent in them is precisely the feeling of life. The characters are not people with whom one can identify, but fragments. By the time of *The Waves* (1931), they are nothing more than voices, absorbed by the sounds of their own words. Lee's biography is likewise bloodless and fragmented. In a work extending to almost 900 pages, and crammed with detail, there is scarcely a sentence that has the vividness of the first biography of Woolf, by Quentin Bell, the son of Virginia's sister, or of any of Woolf's own essays—or indeed of "A Sketch of the Past."

The biography's affectlessness, however, does meld with Virginia's "tenuous sense of self" that, according to Lee, the fiction also records: the outcome of self-censorship imposed by a tyrannical father and Victorian social hypocrisies. Thus, to Lee (as to feminist studies of Woolf), the crucial importance of "A Sketch of the Past." In detailing the years 1897-1904, "the seven unhappy years" after her mother's death, this late memoir supposedly describes how Woolf was "made numb with non-being." The words are Woolf's themselves; Lee's gloss on them is that the source of the non-being was Woolf's "experience of childhood."

But is this the case? The entries from Virginia's youthful diaries that I quoted above gainsay the early years as unhappy. These diaries and her letters also fail to substantiate another more sensational and by-now legendary aspect of Woolf's childhood—molestation by her half-brother, Gerald Duckworth. Woolf herself first described a memory of such an experience in "A Sketch of the Past," and Quentin Bell's biography dutifully passed it on. Despite Nigel Nicolson's warning (in his introduction to the volume of Woolf's letters covering the years 1888 to 1912) that the charge seems to fly in the face of any evidence, it has been solemnly intoned by one scholar after another—as has the additional charge of sexual harassment by her elder half-brother, George. (Virginia began to drop intimations of this in letters and comments to friends after 1915.)

One might expect a biographer to throw some light on all this, but Lee simply asks the reader to accept Virginia's imaginative recreation of events, one that apparently outweighs the puny facts. She also reveals a violently imaginative streak of her own:

> There is no way of knowing whether the teenage Virginia Stephen was fucked or forced to have oral sex or buggered. Nor is it possible to say with certainty that these events . . . drove her mad. But Virginia Woolf herself thought that what had been done to her was very damaging. And to an extent, her life was what she *thought* her life was.

Misperceptions are, of course, the stuff of fiction, but a curious thing emerges from this elision of fact and fiction: calumniating her dead brothers for something that may or may not have occurred becomes a mark of the calumniator's necessary and salvific break with the patriarchy—a break that Woolf's work is then assumed to portray.

Yet despite Lee's talk about silences and self-censorship, the truly silent voices in this biography are those of the two Duckworth brothers, the sons of Virginia's mother by her first marriage. For all one knows, erotic gropings may have been standard fare in large families (eight children and a number of servants under one roof), of which most of us nowadays have only the faintest inkling.* In Virginia's writings before 1909, in any case, you have to search very hard to find traces of animosity toward Gerald or George. The latter seems to have been a proper Victorian gentleman, no doubt a stuffed shirt but one who took seriously his role as quasi-head of the family after his mother's death. In an illuminating diary entry, Virginia mentions that he treated her and Vanessa to "gorgeous strawberry ices" at Gunters in Sloane Square, and then continues: "Began 5th & last vol. of Macaulay." That George might not have been intent on anything nefarious can be gleaned from, say, this entry for May 20, 1897: "I read in bed as usual, *The Scarlet Letter*, & was stopped by Georgie and Nessa at 11 o'clock. Gerald out as usual to 2 dances only this time!"

What is striking about these early writings is their *lack* of morbidity, despite the number of blows their author undoubtedly suffered. Those blows included not only numerous illnesses but the deaths of close family members, including her half-sister Stella in the summer of 1899, when Virginia stopped writing in her diary for several years. But in 1903, the year of her father Leslie's slow death from cancer, when she probably bore the greater burden of caring for him, she penned a series of short, engaging sketches that are remarkably detached, ironic, and polished. Despite the way she

* In contrast to her certainty on the subject of Virginia's half-brothers, Lee dances away from the possibility of incest between Virginia and Vanessa: "[T]o put it simply," she writes cryptically, "Virginia was in love with her sister." But what, "simply," does *that* mean, by Lee's method of reasoning?

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pushed herself, despite a nervous breakdown several months after Leslie's death, the evidence suggests that the events of her life were not about to hinder her from marching happily into her literary future.

By 1905, when she had recovered from her breakdown and her reviewing career was well under way, the diaries reveal an impatient, smart young woman desirous of knowledge and experience and, much like her father, still a conventional British agnostic liberal. True, her assessments of people and events were beginning to undergo a change. By 1908, she had begun working on her first novel. In that year she accompanied her sister Vanessa and Vanessa's husband, Clive Bell, to Italy; though no personal revelations occur in her journal of that trip, we see her thinking long and hard about art, which suggests a deepening of her feelings in general. In contrast to her later reputation as a social iconoclast, she composed a sympathetic portrait of her encounters with "society" in Italy. And there is no suggestion of "sexual confusion," at least none that marriage with a loving and considerate husband would not have ironed out.

The real change occurred thereafter. By January 1915, when her first novel appeared, she had married Leonard Woolf and suffered such a severe breakdown that she came within an inch of ending her life. The diary she began to keep in that year shows a note absent before 1909:

> I begin to loathe my kind, principally from looking at their faces in the tube. Really, raw red beef and silver herrings give me more pleasure to look upon.

WHAT HAD happened to account for this sudden harshness? Feminist critics tend to speak of women writers breaking with patriarchal language and finding a female voice. But it might be asked whether the change in Woolf's language and voice does not really reflect a more masculine influence and origin. The origin I have in mind is suggested by a now-notorious comment of Lytton Strachey, who upon seeing a stain on Vanessa Bell's dress, inquired, "Semen?"

Strachey's query occurred at one of the "Thursday evenings"—the gatherings of the self-consciously enlightened band of Bloomsbury aesthetes (so named for the London neighborhood to which the Stephen children removed after Leslie's death) intent on throwing off the fetters of Victorian hypocrisy. These Thursday evenings had been initiated in 1905 by Virginia's brother Thoby as a way of keeping in touch with his Cambridge classmates—Strachey, Clive Bell, John Maynard Keynes, and so forth. They continued until the fall of 1906, when the four siblings traveled to Greece. It was during this trip that Thoby contracted the typhoid from which he died on his return to England and which led to the further dispersal of the Stephen household when Vanessa accepted Clive Bell's proposal of marriage and Virginia and Adrian removed to a house in Fitzroy Square.

When the Thursday evenings resumed in late 1907, a new tone had set in. Strikingly, Quentin Bell himself attributes the change to Thoby's unexpected death:

> One is inclined to wonder what role this masterful and persuasive young man . . . would have played in the life of his sisters; how would he have regarded Vanessa's increasing libertinism and Virginia's growing tendency to flirtation? Would he have had what is called "a steadying influence"? . . . I suspect that, if he had lived, he would have tended to strengthen rather than to weaken those barriers of speech and thought and custom which were soon to be overthrown among his friends.

This is the closest anyone has come to suggesting that Virginia's sexual confusions, which became pronounced upon her marriage in 1912 to Leonard Woolf (one of Thoby's Cambridge classmates), may have been exacerbated by the company of so many homosexual men speaking openly in her presence about their sexual exploits—all that buggering and oral sex which Lee capriciously pins on George Duckworth. It would take another study to analyze the rise and effects of this phenomenon: the phenomenon of young, educated women discussing sex with men. But could it be that Virginia, from childhood already competitive toward her brothers, was reluctant to censure such behavior or indeed to expose herself as unenlightened? After all, this was, as Lee writes, a period of "enfranchisement . . . when they all established a truthful way of speaking" and began "shedding the inhibitions of the past and turning their gossip—under the tutorship, particularly, of Lytton and Maynard—into what seemed to them daringly erotic scandal."

In the legend that has grown up around Bloomsbury, the most prominent element concerns the allegedly superior qualities of intelligence, taste, and judgment of the primary actors. But in 1912, when Virginia was trying to decide whether to marry Leonard, what might have been the effect on her

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of the following brutal missive from the intelligent and tasteful poet, Rupert Brooke?

> Two fourteen-year-old choirboys arranged a plan during the Choral Service. At the end they skipped round and watched the children enter. They picked out the one whose looks pleased them best, a youth of ten. They waited in seclusion till the end of the children's service. They then pounced on their victim, as he came out, took him, each by a hand, and led him to the vestry. There, while the Service for Men Only proceeded, they removed the lower parts of his clothing and buggered him, turn by turn. His protestations were drowned by the organ pealing out whatever hymns are most suitable for men only. . . . He has been in bed ever since with a rupture.

Throughout the biography, Lee is at her worst when faced with such unpleasantness. (Referring to the contents of Brooke's letter, she lamely writes that Virginia "might well have thought that the whole letter should have been marked, 'Men Only.'") Her strongest evaluation is that Virginia "was poised between incompatible identities and roles." But then, Lee is herself beholden to the same set of newfangled pieties to which Virginia herself was becoming attracted. By 1922, in an essay "Old Bloomsbury," Woolf would pronounce the new openness regarding sex a "great advance in civilization":

> I should be sorry to tell you how old I was before I saw that there is nothing shocking in a man's having a mistress, or in a woman's being one. Perhaps the fidelity of our parents was not the only or inevitably the highest form of married life.

Such high-minded sentiments, it seems pertinent to add, disguised wrenching personal despair, most notably that of her sister Vanessa and her brother-in-law Clive Bell, who had begun marriage so happily yet so blithely slid into adultery. Vanessa eventually entered into a "modern marriage," one shorn of all that fussy Victorian hypocrisy: a 40-year-union with the painter Duncan Grant, a homosexual. Read Frances Spalding's biography, entitled *Vanessa Bell* (1983), and judge for yourself how satisfying that union was.

BORROWING a page from Hermione Lee's method, let me offer an interpretation of the change in Virginia produced by her encounters with the Bloomsbury circle. My text is her problematic first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which contains probably the best description anywhere of the "Bloomsberries," and at a moment when the author's attitudes to them still seem to me quite ambivalent. The novel centers on a group of youthful English tourists vacationing in South America. At tea, they tend to pontificate on the state of "civilization" and let fall judgments that display their pique at not being recognized for the geniuses they are.

The novel's central character is the motherless Rachel Vinrace, a rather dreamy young woman who is also a brilliantly talented pianist despite having scarcely any formal training. At the age of twenty-six, Rachel is as ignorant of the birds and the bees as a well-brought-up female of 100 years ago might be expected to be. But the true mark of her sheltered state is that she regularly goes to church, and her intellectual awakening, which *The Voyage Out* chronicles, is signaled by her dawning realization that religion is a sham.

In one central scene, several of the English tourists have been dragooned into attending a Sunday service, during which they read Sappho's "Ode to Aphrodite" and silently compare the clergyman's smooth, white face to "a very large egg." Rachel, by now having spent a few weeks in the company of these young people, has a revelation of her own:

> She ceased to listen [to the sermon], and fixed her eyes on the face of a woman near her, a hospital nurse, whose expression of devout attention seemed to prove that she was at any rate receiving satisfaction. But looking at her carefully she came to the conclusion that the hospital nurse was only slavishly acquiescent, and that the look of satisfaction was produced by no splendid conception of God within her. How, indeed, could she conceive anything far outside her own experience, a woman with a commonplace face like hers, a little round face, upon which trivial duties and trivial spites had drawn lines, whose weak blue eyes saw without intensity or individuality, whose features were blurred, insensitive, and callous? [The woman] was adoring something shallow and smug, clinging to it, so the obstinate mouth witnessed, with the assiduity of a limpet.

This is Virginia's new voice, one that can be heard often in her writing after her contact with Bloomsbury. It is an antipathetic voice, one that arrogantly proclaims its owner's aesthetic superiority. And the language is raw, redolent of the rawness of Strachey's comment concerning the semen on Vanessa's dress. Here, I believe, is the true birth of

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the "personal" in Woolf—of writing that gives way to the patent indiscretion which in Bloomsbury was taken for a lack of hypocrisy. Soon enough in Woolf's writing the entire domestic economy of the Victorians, with its standards of sexual decorum and other norms of behavior, would emerge encoded as patriarchy.

VIRGINIA WOOLF's early diaries and letters document an enormous desire to make a mark as a writer. Yet her first literary successes occurred as she was thrown into the society of a group of privileged pygmies (John Maynard Keynes excepted). Had she remained a dilettante, in the style of most of the Bloomsberries, she would hold little interest for us today. Her influence comes from the way her scorn for convention was transformed literarily into a quarrel with the rich field of tradition in which she had been nurtured.

But that something expired within her as she assimilated Bloomsbury's standards can be seen once again in the fate of her character Rachel Vinrace, who at the end of *The Voyage Out* dies from an exotic illness in the company of the man to whom she has become engaged and is thereby excluded from a future of marriage and children. Virginia's diaries reveal how much she herself suffered at not having children. In "A Sketch of the Past," the memoir of her parents written a year before her suicide, Woolf lovingly recreated, in her portrait of Julia Stephen, an embodiment of her own desire to have been a mother—"the creator of that crowded merry world which spun so gaily in the center of my childhood." To my mind, the despotic father we encounter in that memoir is less Leslie Stephen himself than a figure for the tyranny Virginia relentlessly imposed on herself in order to break with her patrimony. It was this break that resulted in the "non-being" that the memoir records, just as the suicide that shortly ensued suggests to me her realization of the sterility of everything she had embraced under the name of Bloomsbury.

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OBSERVATIONS

The "Washington Post" vs. Israel

Andrea Levin

EVER SINCE the 1993 Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House lawn, few major newspapers have followed the unfolding Israeli-Palestinian story so assiduously as the *Washington Post*. But the volume of the newspaper's coverage has not been matched by its quality. Far from it.

In one respect this is nothing new. Over the years, the *Post*'s coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict has consistently been marred by a sharp bias in favor of Arab perspectives, a bias that has permeated not only the paper's editorial statements but also its daily news pages. The significance of this failing cannot be underestimated. Inside the Beltway, the *Post* reaches an elite audience of government executives, members of Congress, and representatives of diplomatic missions from around the globe. It counts hundreds of thousands of subscribers, as well as more than 700,000 daily Internet users who "visit" the paper's popular website, where news and commentary are displayed.

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In recent years, the *Post* has turned to repeated and insistent advocacy of a Palestinian state and vehement denunciations of what it sees as Israeli obstacles to that end. In line with this, the paper's editorial page has downplayed or ignored entirely the obligations undertaken by the Palestinians at Oslo. Thus, in March 1994, the *Post* devoted no fewer than four scathing editorials to Baruch Goldstein's murder of Arab worshipers in Hebron, but responded to the first post-Oslo Palestinian bombing attack—which killed eight Israelis in the town of Afula on April 6, 1994—by passing obliquely over Arab culpability to urge that Israel "stay on schedule" in withdrawing from territory so as to "ease the rage" of the Palestinians. When, only a week later, terrorists bombed a bus in Hadera, the *Post* editorial page was silent; nor did it see fit to deplore an October 1994 bombing in Tel Aviv that was the most lethal terrorist attack on Israelis in decades.

When it *has* mentioned Palestinian violations of Oslo, the *Post* typically blames them on alleged Israeli delays in implementing Palestinian demands for statehood. Thus, on January 22, 1995, when nineteen young Israeli men and women were blown up at a bus stop at Beit Lid, the *Post*'s editorialist Stephen Rosenfeld, in a column entitled "Terrorism and the Settlements," made only a nodding reference to the "bloody outrage" but pointedly refrained from calling on Yasir Arafat to fight terrorism; the bulk of the column was devoted instead to criticism of Israel for building the settlements that allegedly had provoked the slaughter.

THE PATTERN set by the *Post*'s editorial page in the days of the Rabin government became solidified with the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Israel's Prime Minister in June 1996. In response to this past summer's upsurge in Palestinian terrorism, *Post* editorials did find room to remonstrate with Arafat for failing to meet his "Oslo obligations to check violence"—this, after the bombing of the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem that killed seventeen people—only to revert swiftly to the paper's preferred theme: Israel's obligation to

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cease its provocations and focus negotiations on "at least a minimally respectable Palestinian state." Similarly, though the *Post* was put out with Arafat for publicly lauding and kissing leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, it took the occasion of September's suicide bombing in the Ben Yehuda mall in Jerusalem to exhort Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to "endorse the Palestinians' goal of a state" on her visit to the Middle East. Its reasoning was that American policy

> is explicitly pointed at delivering to Israel its main goal of peace and security, but it makes no similar deference to the Palestinian goal of statehood. In other words, the Israelis are asked to make concessions and promised what they most want, even while the Palestinians are asked to make concessions with no comparable assurance they will get what they most want.

These words were written in the midst of the worst period of terrorism in Israel's history—*and* in a period when Israel, in compliance with *its* Oslo commitments, has already made it possible for 98 percent of the Palestinian population to live under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The fact that Israel is not obliged by the accords to give the Palestinians a state is passed over by the *Post* as a matter evidently of no consequence. So, too, is the fact that the Palestinians also signed an agreement—actually, several—promising peace to Israel. As for the failure of the PA to revoke the PLO charter calling for Israel's annihilation; the expansion of the Palestinian police force to numbers far beyond those allowed by Oslo; the illegal smuggling of weaponry; the refusal to extradite murderers of Israelis; the hate-mongering and incitement by PA officials, PA-appointed Muslim clerics, PA media, and Arafat himself—violations, all, of obligations solemnly undertaken at Oslo and reiterated in the Hebron agreements of January 1997—these have evoked virtually no mention in *Post* editorials.

ANY PAPER is entitled to turn its opinion pages into a forum for even the most extreme advocacy. But serious publications ordinarily proscribe such advocacy in their reporting of the news. Not so the *Post*.

A September 11 report on Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's trip to the Middle East is a case in point. The report was accompanied by a full-page chart, "Quest for Mideast Peace," which in three separate sections lists the requirements of the Oslo accords. Every single one of the enumerated obligations falls on Israel; none whatsoever on the Palestinians. The full text of the chart, littered with factual errors and reading like an out-and-out propaganda tract, has been added to the newspaper's special website feature on the Middle East peace process.

The *Post*'s bureau chief in Jerusalem is Barton Gellman, a skilled writer who has chronicled much of the Oslo process but has never, in hundreds of stories, analyzed the compliance record of the two parties. Instead, he has given his readers an inaccurate and thoroughly blurred view that emphasizes Israel's responsibility for Arab grievances while occasionally rising to an assessment of evenhanded blame as between the two parties. Thus, on March 25 of this year, following the first major terrorist attack during the Netanyahu administration, Gellman wrote:

> Both halves of the grand bargain outlined [in September 1993]—security and legitimation for Israel, land and power for Palestinians—are now in doubt. And although the bloodshed recently resumed does not approach the scale of an outburst of gun battles six months ago, the gap between the parties is wider now. It is not only the poisonous confluence of Friday's suicide bombing here and Israel's decision to send bulldozers without negotiation into a historically Arab section of East Jerusalem. What really worries intermediaries in the suspended peace talks . . . is that each side is firmly rebuffing the other's highest priority demands.

Gellman's formulation of the forces at play is a masterpiece of obfuscation. The "bloodshed recently resumed" was, as it happens, Israel's blood, and the "gun battles six months ago" were calculated riots and armed aggression incited by the Palestinian Authority in the wake of Israel's opening of a new exit to an existing tourist tunnel. As for the "gap between the parties," attributed with blithe impartiality to "Friday's suicide bombing" and "Israel's decision to send bulldozers without negotiation into a historically Arab section of East Jerusalem," Gellman delicately neglects to inform his readers that fully three-quarters of the "historically Arab" area in question (Har Homa) was already owned by Jews, much of it since before 1948, and that half the population of the eastern part of Jerusalem, which includes the Old City and the 2,000-year-old Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives, happens to be Jewish.

Having made a point of the parties' moral equivalence, Gellman then goes on to fix blame on one party alone. The grim condition of Oslo, he writes, can be traced to "the ascent to power [in Israel] of a government convinced that the accords were, as [Benjamin] Netanyahu said, 'a tragic mistake.'" This, mind you, is the same government that not two months earlier had withdrawn, as promised, from 80 percent of the West Bank city of Hebron.

BOTH REPORTERS and editors at the *Washington Post* have displayed enormous interest in Israel's building policies in Jerusalem, which they invariably characterize as an attempt to strangle Arab development by means of rapacious

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construction campaigns. Thus, on March 2, 1997, Gellman filed a front-page report entitled "East Jerusalem's Transformation: Israel Uses Housing Growth to Cement Dominance." In it he describes a "stunning transformation," by means of which "the Jewish population of East Jerusalem, which stood at zero when Israel captured it in the 1967 Middle East war and reached parity with the Arabs in the 1990's, would reach a decisive majority there."

Aside from the fact that Arabs, not Jews, are currently a majority in East Jerusalem, neatly elided in this report is the pre-1967 reality and the reason the Jewish population "stood at zero" in that year: Jews had been driven from the eastern parts of the city in 1948. Instead of being presented with such inconvenient facts, readers are treated in this article to the case history of one apparently typical Israeli, a television producer who grew up in the suburb of Neve Yaakov, "built in 1968 on expropriated Arab land." One would not know from Gellman's account that Neve Yaakov was one of the Jewish-owned areas of the city, founded originally in 1924 and forcibly evacuated during both the 1929 and 1936 Arab riots; each time, its residents returned to rebuild their homes. On May 15, 1948, as Israel declared its independence, the suburb was attacked by Arab irregulars and the Jews were again compelled to flee.

Similarly, one would not know from Gellman that while the municipality of Jerusalem has assuredly created Jewish neighborhoods in an effort to protect Israeli sovereignty, the Jewish percentage of Jerusalem's population has not risen but fallen since 1967. Moreover, according to a recent analysis by the former city planner Israel Kimhi, the number of Arab apartments in Jerusalem has increased by 122 percent in the past 30 years, as against a rise of 114 percent in Jewish areas. The same study also challenges the commonplace complaint of Western journalists that the Arab sector has received disproportionately fewer building permits, and that Arab structures built without permits have been singled out for demolition by municipal authorities. Contrary to the impression conveyed by Gellman and others, only a fraction of the illegal structures built by Arabs has been taken down by the city—many fewer, in fact, than the number of Jewish houses in West Jerusalem torn down on the same grounds. Throughout the city, indeed, the dramatic scale of Arab building is apparent to anyone, including Barton Gellman, who cares to look.

ARTICLE XXII of the 1995 Interim Agreement specifies that Israel and the Palestinian Authority will "ensure that their respective educational systems contribute to the peace between the Israeli and Palestinians peoples and to peace in the entire region," and that both parties will "refrain from the introduction of any motifs that could adversely affect the process of reconciliation." Although Gellman duly reported in a February 1996 series (written with his colleague John Lancaster) that textbooks in use in West Bank schools have reinstated crude anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist material previously removed by Israeli authorities, he found this but a regrettable and momentary lapse in the otherwise salutary "new thinking" that, he assured his readers, is permeating the "new Palestine." In fact, what the PA teaches in its schools violates Oslo's letter and spirit alike, inculcating a deep hatred of Jews in a new generation of Palestinians. Gellman has been largely silent about this, just as he has been silent about or indulgent of the anti-Israeli and violently anti-Jewish screeds that are staples of the Palestinian media.

Take the widely-disseminated Palestinian charge that Israeli authorities were spiking chewing gum with sex hormones in order to corrupt Arab women and young boys. In a July 28, 1997 story, Gellman treated this claim with tongue-in-cheek seriousness, noting that it was being "promoted at the highest levels of the Palestinian Authority" but failing to tell his readers that such incitement breaches explicit Palestinian commitments under Oslo.

To the contrary, Gellman "balanced" his report of this bizarre libel with a critique of Israel's insistence on Palestinian compliance. "Israel, too," he wrote, "devotes substantial effort these days to discrediting its ostensible negotiating partner." How does it do so? By sending "periodic faxes to foreign reporters about unattractive or allegedly unlawful Palestinian behavior." This "unattractive behavior" includes not only wild allegations about chewing gum but, among a host of other things, actual incitements by the Palestinian Authority to kill Israelis. While Gellman made a point of arranging for a chemical analysis of the gum the Palestinians deem noxious, he has yet to offer an analysis of Palestinian actions in violation of Oslo that have been lethal to the Jews of Israel.

IN BRIEF, whatever the subject, there is virtually no area of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute in which the *Washington Post*, in its news columns as on its editorial page, has not exhibited the same pattern of gross inaccuracy and even grosser bias. Fifteen years ago, in a careful study of the paper's coverage of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Joshua Muravchik observed that the *Post* read "like a newspaper on a crusade. Editorial opinion flowed forth from a variety of sections and departments into a large stream that was uniformly anti-Israel." What was so in 1982 continues unabated to the present day.

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What We Know About Day Care

Joseph Adelson

WHEN, SEVERAL decades ago, I was beginning my own family, all the mothers of my acquaintance stayed at home to raise their children. Most were college graduates, and some had had graduate training or had earned advanced degrees. Of these mothers, a few disliked staying home, and a few showed little interest in or talent for child care. Yet that made no difference. Caring for children was a moral and cultural imperative that, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, they all accepted.

Nowadays, at least among the young professionals and academics I know, or hear about, or teach, or treat in psychotherapy, the exact opposite seems to be the case. Except when children are very young, it is the rare mother who stays home; and when she does, she feels compelled to apologize for her choice—as if, by making it, she has taken the easy way out, or is in flight from the rigors and rewards of a "real" career.

How widespread is this pattern throughout the population? That is hard to say, though clearly it is prevalent, and perhaps dominant, in the middle to upper-middle classes, and it is becoming increasingly common in the working class. A remarkable shift has occurred in American life, which—given the fact that how we are raised is the central circumstance governing what we become—is bound to have a deep effect on future generations. Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that, all things considered, this development has attracted relatively little serious attention.

I hardly mean that the subject has escaped the notice of politicians: the White House conference scheduled for late October is but one high-profile effort to "capture" the public-policy (and also the partisan) implications of an issue that directly concerns millions of American parents. Nor has there been any lack of opinion-mongering about the effects of day care on the young—though until recently one could count on the fingers of one hand the number of thoughtful observers willing to brave the conventional wisdom that those effects have been neutral if not positively benign.* But in the *professional* literature, the dearth of really good research and analysis is quite startling, especially in light of the abundance of scholarly writing on many issues of much less importance.

Before inquiring into why that may be so, I should stipulate that "day care" is a large and unwieldy category. What are we talking about—a few hours a week, or twelve hours a day? Carried out by whom—the thirteen-year-old next door, or a licensed teacher? What sort of arrangement—one on one, or in a large group with several caretakers? What about the children—do they come from secure and stable homes, or are they troubled? How old were they when day care began, and for how long did it continue? How are we to measure whether day care "works," and what do we mean by "works"?

These questions, and others like them, can be answered, though not easily. To do so with any exactitude requires an enormous expenditure of time, energy, and money, as well as a high degree of analytic competence. That, I know, is a platitude, and one commonly advanced about many complicated issues. I adduce it here only because, on this particular issue, so many people, including professional social scientists, have felt a powerful need to come to the "right" answer. And that "right" answer, of course, is the one most parents want to hear: namely, that, within limits, day care is a perfectly adequate substitute for a mother's care, and in some cases may even be superior.

Within the scholarly community, there has been, in fact, no lack of leading authorities eager to support this view, even if doing so has involved cutting corners and rushing to judgment. Perhaps its strongest and most unflinching proponents are those who look at day care strictly from an economic perspective. When properly thought out

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* See, in COMMENTARY, Mary Eberstadt, "Putting Children Last" (May 1995) and David Gelernter, "Why Mothers Should Stay Home" (February 1996). More recently, even the popular magazines have begun to raise a belated eyebrow over America's new child-rearing practices (see, for instance, "The Myth of Quality Time" in *Newsweek*, May 12, 1997).

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and carefully organized, day care, they argue, allows for the most efficient use of a mother's talents—talents that would otherwise be wasted. The resulting rise in productivity, along with the taxes it generates, provides an economic surplus that easily compensates for any added costs that may be associated with the child-care system itself.

Beyond this economic argument, academic and public-policy proponents of day care point to a host of other benefits it allegedly engenders. By freeing women from dependency on men and marriage, day care helps eliminate sex differentiation, the major source of women's inequality. In addition, it rescues them from the anxieties and stress that accompany full-time motherhood. Finally, it is good for the children themselves, freeing them from their mothers' psychological and/or intellectual limits, providing a better early education at the hands of trained workers, and offering expanded opportunities to meet other children. It even reduces the rate of injury and death among young children.

IN SUMMARIZING these arguments, I have been drawing upon an excellent analysis by the British sociologist and family-policy specialist Patricia Morgan, who has written the most definitive account I have so far seen of this entire issue.* (Unfortunately, her book, which was published in England, seems to be unavailable here.) Morgan herself does not share the position of the proponents, which (as she points out) concentrates almost entirely on the interests of the mother and more or less ignores father, siblings, and, especially, child. But neither does she adhere to the opposite—if much less common—position, which views *any* rupture of the bond between mother and infant or young child as almost inevitably damaging. In this view, held by some psychologists, even temporary suspensions of the mother-child tie can induce uncertainty, distrust, anxiety, or much worse.

One need not, however, embrace the psychologists' position at its most extreme to conclude, as Patricia Morgan does on the basis of an exceedingly careful examination of the evidence, that day care only rarely measures up to a mother's care, and even more rarely to the claims made by its supporters. Yes, she notes, there are variables, and they do matter: the age at which day care begins; the number of hours a child attends in a day, and for how long; the nature and character of the providers; and so forth. But taken one by one, and assessed dispassionately, the research findings we possess paint a dispiriting picture.

They testify, for instance, to high levels of aggressiveness and antisocial behavior among children in day care, and to youngsters who, in comparison with their peers, are apathetic, inattentive, and unresponsive. In one study, children who had been in full-time day care from early on were "more likely to hit, kick, and push." An even more striking finding is this: in many cases, children's intellectual development is impaired—not dramatically, but enough to achieve statistical significance.

Are there no exceptions? There are, a few. Perhaps the best-known is the Perry School Project, a program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, which over a period of years produced remarkable long-term changes in its target population of impoverished black youngsters. These children of unemployed fathers or of single mothers living in crowded homes were tracked into adulthood; follow-up studies revealed that they earned more and had fewer arrests than their peers from similar backgrounds; the girls among them were also less likely to become pregnant out of wedlock.

The Perry School Project is a bright and shining example of what day care at its best can accomplish. But it is also, as Patricia Morgan emphasizes, "virtually unique." In fact, she goes on to say, "no other program has recorded similar effects on teen pregnancy, crime, welfare, unemployment, and other social outcomes." Tellingly, she points to one aspect of the Perry program that is either unemphasized or unmentioned in the glowing reports on it—namely, the important role played by frequent visits to the children's homes by the project's staff. Morgan quite plausibly suggests, indeed, that this constant monitoring of the home may have been crucial to the program's success.

IN ANY case, if we leave aside Perry and a few other high-quality, high-cost programs, and force ourselves to look at day care as it is rather than as we might wish it to be, the facts are as implacable as their explanation seems obvious. The typical child in day care simply does not receive the same amount of individual attention, or the same degree of focused intensity, he would receive from a parent. There is rarely the same degree of continuity in the relationship between child and adult. Nor is there a family history or sense of lineage to help a child establish his identity. As for the people running the programs, caring for children is, for many of them, not a source of pride or prestige; they just go through the motions.

In short, the best and the most natural domicile for raising a child is the family. Obviously. It is only because we have made ourselves so fearful of claiming that *any* human arrangement is "natural" that it becomes necessary to search through data and argument to establish what is, obviously, so. That—and the fact that a substantial body of opinion holds otherwise.

As Morgan painstakingly demonstrates, however, the scholarly writing in support of day care is largely anecdotal. Empirical evidence, when

* *Who Needs Parents?: The Effects of Childcare and Early Education on Children in Britain and the USA* (IEA Press, 1996).

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adduced at all, invariably turns out to be of questionable validity. More troubling still is the failure of scholarly proponents to discuss significant contrary findings—as, for example, the ample evidence that for working mothers, the pressures of a job are often *more* onerous than the pressures of caring for children at home. Indeed, study after study tells of working mothers struggling to cope, to keep their spirits up, but succumbing to depression and anxiety. Though one would never know it from the pro-day-care literature, a substantial majority of mothers themselves, whether or not they work, favor parental care for children under school age, and in some studies this view is all but unanimous.

What we have here is the familiar and discouraging story of ideology trumping evidence. In this case, the ideology in question is feminism, with its detestation of the very idea of sexual differences in sentiment, aptitude, or behavior. Feminist thinking, married (if that is a permissible word in this context) to a utopianism that envisions a cost-free end to all the encumbrances and limitations of domestic life, launched us on an experiment bearing untold implications for the health of our children, and has enlisted the sympathies of academic researchers to adjust results to expectations. For that reason alone, one is unendingly grateful to those, like Patricia Morgan, who have the aptitude and the patience to sift the evidence with a more rigorous eye for what it actually says.

As for those little ones on whom the experiment has been conducted, one can only pray that as many of them as possible will escape its worst effects, and that hitting, kicking, and pushing is the worst harm they will do to others.

In and Out at the "New Republic"

Midge Decter

IF AGE is a measure of venerability—and when one is speaking of magazines, there is good reason to consider it so—then the *New Republic* can claim to be America's most venerable liberal weekly. There are, to be sure, a number of other weekly magazines boasting circulations and a general visibility many times greater. They range from *Time* and *Newsweek*, which still claim with straight faces to be doing little more than recapitulating the news, to the *New Yorker*, which only recently doffed its high hat and moved honestly into the political fray. Virtually all of these, whether they admit it or not, are liberal. But none has been around as long as the *New Republic*—except for the *Nation*, which in living memory has not been anything but radical. Nor has any been so consistently devoted down through the years to serious political and cultural comment on the week's events.

Because of a peculiar circumstance, there is something else to be said about today's *New Republic*. Although it is produced in Washington, D.C., and is predominantly taken up with the affairs of the capital, its current owner and publisher, Martin Peretz, lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has remained a true and loyal citizen of Harvard University. Thus, in addition to its venerability, the magazine under Peretz has acquired what might be called a special Northeastern-corridor cachet, consisting of two parts inside-Washington professionalism to one part tony amateurism. This

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uneasy cocktail may help account for something remarked upon by many readers: the way in which, in any given issue, and sometimes even on the same page, high and low, serious and frivolous, often seem to be jostling for space.

This is hardly to say that there have been no consistencies of theme and emphasis in Peretz's *New Republic*. The good name and the security of the state of Israel, for example, are subjects concerning which he has offered his editors in Washington no wiggle room. Nor, during the days of the cold war, would he countenance any expression of tolerance for totalitarian regimes (a position at variance, shall we say, to that of the *New Republic* in earlier days). But for the rest, his magazine has been left to wander pretty much without his guidance over much of the policy terrain, from advocacy of the hapless Jimmy Carter in the late 1970's to a recent preoccupation with the issue of homosexual rights.

And the magazine has wandered in more senses than one. In the course of Peretz's ownership the *New Republic*'s staff has been placed under the authority of what, for the magazine business, is surely an unprecedented number of chief editors, one of whom has even come and gone twice. In their various ways, most of these editors have been talented men. But given the rapidity of their entrances and exits, their commitment to, and ambitions for, the magazine have inevitably seemed somewhat less than profound.

SO MUCH for background. Last year, the then-editor of the *New Republic*, Andrew Sullivan, announced that he had contracted AIDS, and was giving up his post. The event occasioned a fair amount of talk. As an Englishman and a self-proclaimed Tory, Sullivan had been a puzzling choice for the position of editor in the first place. But for many liberal readers, the problem presented by his offbeat political coloration seemed to be mitigated by his sexual one, which was openly on display both in his own writings and in the sorts of articles he commissioned and promoted. Many of these articles, as it happens, advocated the virtues of monogamy, and therefore the desirability of state-sanctioned marriage, for homosexuals, thus further reinforcing liberal sympathy for the "cause" Sullivan represented.

But now, in Sullivan's grim announcement of his illness, and in the flagrantly contradictory message it conveyed as to the character of the homosexual love he championed, the intellectual integrity of his arguments seemed rather to be undercut. The resultant brouhaha made it somewhat easier to say aloud what at least some readers had been saying in private—that the magazine under Sullivan's direction had suffered a distinct falling-off both in editorial quality and in intellectual edge.

In any event, interest in the career and fate of Andrew Sullivan turned out to be short-lived, driven from the Washington radar screen by the universally enthusiastic response to the announcement that he would be succeeded in the editorship by Michael Kelly. The choice seemed ideal: Kelly is a journalist who, as a reporter for the *New York Times*, had been widely and deservedly noticed for his intelligence, his literacy, and his wit, qualities not exactly in abundant supply in the newspaper business. He had then left the *Times* to become Washington editor of the *New Yorker*, and from there Peretz brought him to the top of his own masthead.

Alas, it was not meant to be. In Peretz's *New Republic*, it has become common practice for the editor to write the front-of-the-book column cryptically labeled "TRB." This column is a historic feature of the magazine (though in the pre-Peretz era it was composed not by the editor but by a columnist whose exclusive bailiwick it was), and Kelly undertook to produce it with obvious gusto and to immediate acclaim. But if his readers enjoyed the results of Kelly's efforts, evidently his employer was growing increasingly unhappy.

The reason is simple: among Kelly's special targets of interest was the scandal surrounding the fund-raising practices of the Clinton White House—the one instance of this administration's misbehavior that may end by doing it serious damage. Among those centrally implicated in the scandal is Vice President Albert Gore, who happens to have been a student of Peretz at Harvard and who remains a longtime personal friend and beyond a doubt the publisher's candidate for the presidency in 2000. Kelly, who for years had been covering the White House with all due stringency, gave no quarter to either Gore or Clinton in his columns. On September 5, nine months after his ascension to the editorship, he was summarily fired.

THOUGH THERE was, in the nature of things, much gossip about this sudden dismissal, and much speculation as to the "real" motives behind it, Peretz himself could not have been clearer in stating his reasons, which he did the very day after Kelly's removal. "The chasm between Mike's opinions and mine," he told the *Washington Post*, "and Mike's opinions and those of other editors, was both wide and increasingly deep." The last straw, it seems, was Kelly's refusal to publish an unsigned item by Peretz himself, arguing that the most recent allegations about Gore's improper activities were "overblown and old news."

It could be said that, by declining to print what would in only a few days be exposed as nonsense, Kelly was saving his employer from considerable embarrassment. It could also be said, however, that Peretz was entitled to publish anything he want-

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ed in the *New Republic*—it is, after all, his magazine, no matter what pretense of collegial equality is maintained in its offices. But adjudicate this particular matter as one may, the fact is that the magazine's staff was profoundly upset by Peretz's move. One associate editor resigned, out of fellow-feeling for Kelly or perhaps simply so as not to be seen as someone perforce in the pocket of the Clinton administration. Others managed to make their displeasure known not only to their boss but far and wide in Washington.

In the end, Peretz swiftly chose Charles Lane, the *New Republic*'s in-office foreign-policy maven, to be the new editor. He is thus the third within a year, which may indeed be some kind of record. As it must do, life at the *New Republic* has undoubtedly continued to go on its hurried way.

IT WOULD be easy, and even proper, to chalk up Michael Kelly's unhappy experience with Martin Peretz to the latter's blind and unremitting ambition for his friend Al Gore. ("Everybody," Daniel Patrick Moynihan once pointed out, "likes to know a President.") And it would be no less easy to ascribe Peretz's earlier editorial flirtation with Andrew Sullivan to a leftover youthful impulse to titillate for the sake of titillating; one should never underestimate the effect on grown men of longtime residence in proximity to Harvard undergraduates.

But Peretz's real difficulty—hence, the difficulty of his magazine—is neither misplaced loyalty nor the urge to be too clever by half. It is that, by trying to stay on a path that is no longer there, he has ended by having to pick his way through a field of political and ideological brambles. Although he seems manifestly unconvinced by many of the doctrines, and perhaps most of the nostrums, of contemporary liberalism, he has been trying to remain, God help him, an eclectic liberal.

I say "eclectic liberal" rather than "neoliberal"—a term that came into fashion a decade or so ago, and enjoyed a vogue at the *New Republic* and elsewhere—because a neoliberal is generally one who, for one reason or another, has become deeply displeased with the choices on offer in the Democratic party. An eclectic liberal, by contrast, is one who wishes not to be bound by *any* combination of choices.

It is certainly possible to be such an animal in the voting booth. It is perhaps even possible to play at being one as an elected official in a legislature. Bill Clinton himself, as he ricochets from socialized medicine to balanced budgets to apologizing for slavery, has benefited mightily from pretending to be a liberal pretending to be a conservative pretending to be a liberal. But no one credits the President's sincerity. Rather the opposite: politically, he gives people hope that, under the right conditions, he can be bought for whatever happens to suit *them*.

Martin Peretz is by no means to be likened to Bill Clinton. For one thing, there is no pretense about what he believes and what he does not believe. For another, he has laid on the line both his fortune and his fortunes in the service of those beliefs. The problem, rather, is that what he really believes comes entailed with implications that he appears unwilling either to accept wholeheartedly or wholeheartedly to repudiate. For an intellectual like Peretz, unlike for a politician, the resultant eclecticism spells confusion and/or disingenuousness; neither of these dispositions is helpful (to put it mildly) in the management of a serious magazine.

WHETHER AND how Peretz's *New Republic* will ever work out its relation to the congeries of contemporary political attitudes that has successfully preempted the liberal name is a nice question. To take an obvious example, one would like to know how the current liberal wisdom on matters of defense—namely, that, the cold war being over, the United States can and must reduce its military forces and devote its energies to internal self-improvement—is to be squared with Peretz's bedrock support of Israel, whose security continues to depend on an American imperium with a strong system of defense and an ecumenical body of opinion firm enough to keep things going regardless of who is in the White House.

The list of such conflicted issues could be extended indefinitely. Race relations, for example, is a subject on which, from the President and Vice President on down, today's liberals, had they the power to do so, would simply interdict serious discussion, restricting everyone to the utterance of a few unconsidered and unfelt propositions. Concerning women and their newfound attitudes both to men and to their own lives, liberals have again striven, rather more successfully than with respect to race, to keep the conversation within bounds of their own careful choosing. And what liberalism has done to the scholarly and intellectual life of the universities is something in which Peretz, having experienced it at first hand, can have taken no pride or pleasure.

A FAIR-MINDED reader must acknowledge that many of the fruits of the current liberal "project" have received only half a welcome, if that, in the columns of Martin Peretz's *New Republic*. But if the magazine does not wholly embrace the going demands of liberalism as its own, neither will it set them aside for others. Its eclectic strategy, rather, takes two forms. Sometimes it merely lets a hundred flowers bloom, resulting in a general patina of incoherence. Thus, a tough editorial on the insidious effects of identity politics in our national life may be printed alongside a brief for homosexual marriage rooted in, precisely, the logic of identity poli-

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tics. At other times, the magazine allows its writers to embezzle current conservative ideas and then pawn them off as liberal. An article in a recent issue, for instance, cheekily makes the case that support for the National Endowment for the Arts—a liberal imperative if ever there was one—is no longer a liberal imperative after all; in fact, the author asserts, a *proper* liberal position on this matter should be based on—guess what?—the superiority of the marketplace.

In the end, this double-negative style of political thinking is surely what for many readers gives the *New Republic* an air of saving liveliness. For others, however, its undigested eclecticism might as easily create the impression of mere instability, of the failure to develop a considered view of life. But whatever one calls the condition, it is difficult to see how, in an age when liberalism has so badly betrayed its name and heritage, Martin Peretz's brand of liberalism will ever set him at peace—with his own opinions, with his own hopes, or with his own editors.

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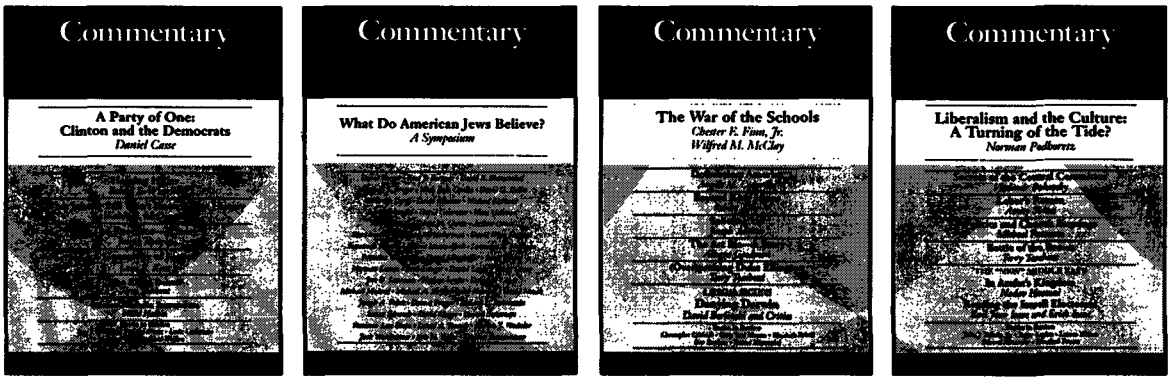

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Reviewed by
David Pryce-Jones

THE BRITISH journalist Timothy Garton Ash made his reputation in the late 1980's by writing thoughtful reportage on the liberation of Eastern Europe from Communism. To many observers in those days, Communism under its new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, seemed to be moving toward the fulfillment of its initial aims. Not gullible like that, Garton Ash could recognize an ailing police state when he saw it. "Refolution" was the word he coined to describe the effect of Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika* on the satellite states of Eastern Europe: reform giving way to revolution. But as we see in *The File*, a gracefully if rather self-consciously written memoir, Garton Ash's attitude toward these crumbling regimes had at its core something incomplete and even enigmatic.

"I was just so lucky," he writes of himself. "Lucky in the country of my birth. Lucky in my privileged background." Born in 1955, Garton Ash grew up in a solid family of civil servants, accountants, members of parliament, and the like. A first-rate English school was in store, then Oxford. He aspired to be a liberal in the tradition of Macaulay, George Orwell, and Isaiah Berlin. Amiably, he notes that as he set about duly to earn his own entry in *Who's Who*, he was equipped with tweeds and heavy shoes, a blue Alfa Romeo, and an inherited income.

In common with many of his contemporaries, Garton Ash was stamped by the war against Nazism. At the Normandy landings in 1944, his father had won the prestigious Military Cross. If the son was born too late to fight, he could still empathize with the father's experience, and so in 1978 he crossed the Channel and drove his Alfa Romeo to Germany to do research for a doctoral thesis about Berlin under Hitler's rule.

In the divided city, on the front line of the cold war, Communism, he tells us, intruded upon him for the first time—if in an elusive way. On the Western side, he found himself among Germans whose own formative experience had been the leftist-led student demonstrations of May 1968. Embittered hippies in a counterculture, they imagined their own country to be still Nazi in spirit, while their spiritual home lay in the Communist state next door (though of course they were spared the need to live there). This raised the question in Garton Ash's mind: who *were* the bad Germans, and who the good?

Under the terms of an East-West cultural agreement, he was permitted to pursue his research in the East, and so in 1980 he drove through the Wall to spend a year in the other half of Berlin. Soon he was making new and unexpected friends. Some were drawn from the ranks of the discontented in many walks of life; others were Communists, past or present. Fixed generalizations began to dissolve. Here

DAVID PRYCE-JONES *is the author of, among other books,* The Strange Death of the Soviet Empire *and* The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs.

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were essentially good Germans in need of help against a bad regime.

Feeling, as he puts it, "a growing sense that there was still a war on"—namely, against Soviet Communism—Garton Ash took up the cause of his new friends. He became a spokesman for Solidarity in Poland, and then rushed on to Budapest and Prague. There, he relates, at the outset of Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution in 1989, he was able to impart wit and wisdom to Vaclav Havel. Promoting himself as an honorary dissident, he reported to the West on what he was observing.

GARTON ASH's encounter with totalitarianism was, as such things go, run-of-the-mill. In his decade of wandering about the lands of the Warsaw Pact, nothing untoward happened to him: no arrests or confrontations, not even detention at a border. Still, in the eyes of the secret police, an interloper like him, if not a "useful idiot," might be a spy, and in either case was to be watched.

The East German police—the Stasi—numbered in those years over 90,000, reinforced by 170,000 informers. The files are said to occupy over 200 kilometers of shelving; now open, they are an unmatched X-ray of the innards of a totalitarian order. More than one Stasi department kept tabs on Garton Ash. His case officer was a Lieutenant Wendt, who relied on five well-placed informants.

In this book, Garton Ash gives an account of the Stasi archives and the effect on East Germans of their opening. Reading through his own file, all 325 pages of it, he recaptured much fugitive detail that he was able to check against the diaries he kept at the time. Although the Stasi were unfamiliar with Englishmen of his sort, and therefore made small and amusing slips of interpretation, their overall thoroughness was impressive. At least in their initial reports, he found, he had been classified as "bourgeois-liberal," a category they evidently could live with.

In preparing to write *The File*, Garton Ash also arranged to meet those who had informed on him, only to discover that he was an unwelcome figure from the past. None of them had done anything truly damaging: no lies, no false witness. One was a woman too old to jettison the doctrinaire Communism of her youth. Another was a British Communist, timid and foolish. The most obstreperous was connected to the museum world, and had collaborated with the secret police in the hope that she would be rewarded with otherwise forbidden foreign trips.

Garton Ash treats all this in a tone of pity, which he extends as well to the Stasi officers in his case whom he tracked down. Fat-bellied, truculent, or bored, they were set in their ways, sorry for themselves, intermittently defiant. Lieutenant Wendt alone showed a perverse dignity, by refusing either to give an interview or to explain his silence.

THERE OUR interest in this book might have fizzled out, were it not for the peculiarly enigmatic qualities I mentioned earlier. As a boy, Garton Ash tells us, he had been inspired by the part played by Oxford academics in wartime British intelligence, and also by the novels of Graham Greene. At Oxford, someone had picked up on his romantic view of espionage, and in a typical process of winks and nods, the British secret service had sought to enroll him in the struggle against Communism as he was graduating and planning to go to Eastern Europe. In his diary, he recorded that the offer had come with the words, "We want you under our control." Not liking the sound of that, he had refused.

But what heavy weather, and what moral confusion, he makes here of an approach which, after all, came to nothing. "I imagine," he writes, "trying to explain to a Czech or Polish friend, for whom 'secret service' immediately sounds like 'secret police,' how I could even have contemplated it." A sillier example of false equivalence could hardly be found. Far from being shocked that he might work for the British secret service, Czechs or Poles at that time would have considered it wonderful and brave that someone of his caliber was seeking to do whatever he could for them, by whatever means were at hand.

Nor is that the end of the puzzle. May not even an investigating journalist, Garton Ash worries aloud, be considered something of an agent and spy? Does he not ask questions, keep files, betray confidences and contacts? Laboring this rather simple and again false idea, he exaggerates his role of self-appointed East European dissident even while subtly deprecating it:

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> Although an East German prosecutor could certainly have argued that I was collecting information for "foreign organizations," in the deliberately vague wording of Article 97 of the Criminal Code, I was probably never at risk of the prescribed jail sentence envisaged in "especially serious cases," let alone the death sentence.

Garton Ash's personal equivocations have, of course, a political significance. In this book as in his other works, Communist ideology seems never to have concerned him much. Nothing in his writings, so far as I know, suggests that he ever experienced the Soviet Union firsthand, or reflected on its global purposes. Writing out of the confines of his heady experience in East Germany and the other main satellites, he draws a picture of Communism's unraveling in which a handful of social-democratic dissidents mobilize the people to liberate themselves. What is remarkable about this version of the successful ending of the cold war is that the United States plays no role in it. Rather, the revolution is seen as a famous victory *for the Left*, quite free from any taint of what used to be derided in liberal and leftist circles as "professional" anti-Communism.

This is hardly to say that Garton Ash was not himself an opponent of Communism. But the sustained moral and military effort that successive American administrations put into resisting Soviet ambitions everywhere is something he cannot bring himself either to acknowledge or to credit. On the contrary, a visit Garton Ash made to Central America in 1984 led him to conclude that there was nothing to choose between armed intervention by the United States against Communist insurgencies in that region and the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe.

Some years after opening the dossier on him, the Stasi revised their judgment of Timothy Garton Ash and concluded that he was not a relatively harmless "bourgeois-liberal" after all but rather a hopeless case: they relabeled him "conservative and reactionary." Considering the source, one would think he would take this as high praise. But Garton Ash flinches, as though the epithet were an insult that might rob him of his protected status as honorary dissident, and separate him forever from the company of Orwell and Isaiah Berlin.

His has indeed been, as he acknowledges, a lucky life, and a privileged one. An apologetic attitude toward the good uses to which he put his luck and privilege was not in order at the time, and is mystifying now.

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Modern Times

The One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Enigma of Efficiency

by Robert Kanigel

Viking. 675 pp. $34.95

Reviewed by
Christopher Caldwell

IN LAST spring's elections in France, the soon-to-be victorious socialists implored voters not to give in to the *tayloriste* pressures of the global economy, or to allow French companies to become *taylorisé*. In a number of foreign languages, indeed, the name of the American industrialist Frederick Winslow Taylor still stands for everything bad about the modern workplace. If his name is not similarly invoked in his native country, some would say that is because we live so deeply inside his system we no longer even see it.

Taylor (1856-1915) invented time studies, the manufacturing process for tungsten steel, and personnel departments. More generally, he was the first champion of "scientific management," which placed at the center of business life the cult of white-collar expertise and the relentless quest for efficiency. All this is summed up in one of Taylor's famous aphorisms: "In the past the man was first; in the future, the system must be first."

That Taylor is the father of 20th-century work-life is a claim routinely made. The management consultant Peter Drucker ranks Taylor with Darwin, Freud, and Marx as a shaper of our world. If so, he is a no less ambiguous figure than they, for his admirers ranged from the journalist Walter Lippmann to V.I. Lenin, from Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis to Mussolini. In *The One Best Way*, Robert Kanigel examines, eight decades after Taylor's death, what it is he wrought.

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL *is senior writer at the* Weekly Standard *in Washington, D.C.*

TAYLOR WAS born just outside Philadelphia. On his father's side he was descended from the biggest landowners in Bucks County, on his mother's from a family of prominent abolitionists and feminists who were intimate with William Lloyd Garrison and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. For Kanigel, both inheritances are important, if in complicated ways.

First, the wealth of his father's side. Unlike the "true Old Philadelphian . . . who is born retired," Taylor would boast throughout his life of having left Exeter, rejected Harvard, and started work as a factory apprentice. This, Taylor felt, gave him the bona fides to dismiss complaints from workers about the harshness of his innovations; he, after all, had been one of them. But Kanigel shows that in fact Taylor chose the shop floor not as a career but as a means of grooming himself for the front office. He was a factory hand who would benefit both recreationally from his family's wealth (a series of mansions, trips to Europe, magnificent rose gardens) and professionally from his family's connections, particularly among the industrialists who funded his ideas and promoted him up the management ladder.

Second, the progressive enthusiasms of his mother's side. Taylor claimed to be a revolutionary, but according to Kanigel he never had an inspiration that was not already in the air. His parents worried throughout his Exeter years that his grades were too *high*; knowing him to be "no genius," they fretted that he must be punishing himself. His boyhood hobbies were all fads of the day: egg-collecting, gymnastics, bicycle-riding, sculling, tennis. The one thing he valued most about his apprenticeship among the proletarians was the chance to learn the vocabulary of swearing; throughout his life he would be partial to Anglo-Saxon words, which he considered more "virile" than their Romance counterparts (hence his preference for "gang boss" over the more effeminate "supervisor").

NOT UNTIL late in his career did Taylor conceive an overarching idea of what he was doing or what he had, in fact, achieved. Scientific management, although he described it as a "mental revolution," was not a system but a series of piecemeal innovations. The earliest of these came in 1881, when the twenty-five-year-old Taylor, who had joined the staff of the fledgling Midvale Steel Company three years earlier, became a gang boss and decided to solve the problem of "soldiering" that he had observed during his apprenticeship. This was the tacit agreement among workers paid by the piece to do less work than they were capable of. It was a matter not of laziness but of economic self-defense; once their productivity rose to their capacity, proprietors would cut the rate, leaving them working much harder but just as ill-paid.

Taylor's bright idea was the "differential rate," which, by increasing the amount paid per piece as productivity rose, theoretically gave workers an incentive to improve. When even this turned out to be useless, Taylor resorted to the stopwatch, and in the process invented the job of efficiency expert. Breaking down each task into as many as several dozen subtasks, he observed workers during their most productive moments and timed their performance. When he got a reading on their optimal output, he subtracted an arbitrary percentage for such workplace exigencies as resting and trips to the bathroom and then used this output as the threshold for a new and higher pay rate. Foremen and workmen who could not meet it were to be fired.

Taylor had hit upon a system that could be applied not just to the factory floor but to practically everything. Using his stopwatch-driv-

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en search for the "one best way," he put a halt to drunkenness at the Midvale plant; developed a new flexible steam hammer; invented a device for measuring ball-bearings that was accurate to one ten-thousandth of an inch; and became the world's leading expert on drive-belt endurance. Most importantly, while in the employ of Bethlehem Steel, he and the dipsomaniac metallurgist Maunsel White invented a new heat-treated "tool steel" that doubled industry productivity and remains the basis for the tungsten steel used for practically everything today. Outside the factory, as he and others quickly saw, Taylor's principles were adaptable to home, university, government, and the military. "Nothing," writes Kanigel, "was too slight to escape study and improvement."

THE MAN behind the method was mercurial. In family life he could be doting—he adopted three of the four children of an insane man, Dr. William Aiken, who had shot his wife and killed himself (the fourth and oldest sibling, then eleven years old, was Conrad, who would become the famous writer). That, however, is the only evidence of warm-heartedness that emerges from this biography. Taylor, Kanigel tells us, had a "genius for making enemies." He was not above industrial espionage, and in the pre-Teddy Roosevelt years counseled the (then-common) practices of price-fixing and collusion. What is more, he failed at much he undertook. Bethlehem Steel eventually fired him, he ran a pair of paper mills into the ground, the entire workforce of his Simonds ball-bearing plant walked out on him, and machinists struck the armory in Watertown, Massachusetts, that was a showpiece of the Taylor system.

Nonetheless, managers had an abiding respect for his innovations, and they flocked by the dozens to Boxly, his Pennsylvania mansion, where he delivered a regular spiel that verged on the monomaniacal. He also attracted apostles who spread his theories into the workplaces of America. These included Frank Gilbreth, the efficiency expert who would write the enduringly popular memoir, *Cheaper by the Dozen*. Another acolyte, Morris Cooke, boiled down Taylor's talks into *The Principles of Scientific Management*, a book that became "the Bible of American management" and was soon translated into dozens of languages.

FIVE YEARS after his book had made him an international celebrity, Taylor was dead at fifty-nine. What of his system remains? Kanigel concludes with a 60-page book-within-a-book examining its ambiguous fallout. He explores how Taylorism differs from assembly-line "Fordism" (to Kanigel's mind, the latter is merely an application of the former); whether Taylorism was democratic or despotic (it was democratic, Kanigel thinks, in its removal of favoritism and arbitrary powers, but undemocratic in its denial to working people of any individuality or any voice in management); and even whether Taylorism, as some scholars have argued, provided the organizing principles for the Nazi death camps (Kanigel answers an emphatic no).

This tour of Taylor's legacy is the most engrossing part of the book, but takes up far too little of it. For the rest, Kanigel's treatment, though balanced and comprehensive, is cluttered with excessive detail about Taylor's life—the curriculum at Exeter, techniques for molding pig iron, lathe-bit sales, the Mitscherlich papermaking process, and so on. That is unfortunate, because the nature of his legacy deserves to be reexamined.

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Is Taylorism the perfect metaphor for modernity, particularly in its capitalist aspect? In the Eisenhower years, which saw the growth of corporations organized along military lines and the cult of expertise at its height, many observers on the Left direly predicted that Taylorism (whether they called it that or not) was destined to permeate every area of our lives. As late as the mid-1970's, the Marxist sociologist Harry Braverman made Taylor the villain of his *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

But this Marxist reading had things backward. In essence, Taylorism was itself nothing but a quest to turn companies into little planned economies. As the 1980's and 1990's have dramatically shown, entities organized around the Taylorite assumption that there is "one best way," whether they are businesses like IBM or whole empires like the Soviet Union, are generally punished or forced to change, and if not sooner then later. At the end of the century, we may finally be escaping the grip of this assumption, and should even be prepared to concede that it takes more than one metaphor to encompass modernity's boundless variety.

Jeremiah?

Novels and Other Writings
by Nathanael West
edited by Sacvan Bercovitch
Library of America. 829 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Algis Valiunas

AT THE time of his death in a car wreck in 1940, Nathanael West was thirty-seven years old and had written four short novels, a play, and a number of movie scripts. The novels had not sold, and the play closed after two performances. "I once tried to work seriously at my craft but was unable to make even the beginning of a living," West (who was born Nathan Weinstein) wrote to the critic Edmund Wilson in 1939, explaining why he was then in Hollywood. But things were not so bad during the last few years of West's life. He had his admirers—Wilson, William Carlos Williams, Aldous Huxley, and F. Scott Fitzgerald among them—and he was making enough money as a screenwriter to buy himself time to try his hand at another novel.

Then West ran a stop sign, and the novel never got written. As for the four that did, almost no one read them until they were reprinted in the late 1950's, when they enjoyed a considerable success. West's reputation has grown ever since, and it was inevitable that he should be marked with the sign of supreme native literary achievement and accorded a place in the Library of America. Sacvan Bercovitch, a professor of English at Harvard, has edited this volume, which fattens a slender accomplishment: besides the four novels, the book includes *Good Hunting*, a play about World War I; a screenplay, *Before the Fact*, which was extensively reworked by others and became the Hitchcock movie *Suspicion*; a couple of movie outlines; a handful of brief essays; some inane short stories; one of the silliest poems ever written by a grown man; and letters.

What makes West a classic, according to the Library of America's publisher, Max Rudin, is that he is like us: "West's blend of manic farce, despair, and compassion feels very contemporary, as does his fascination with the literary possibilities of pop culture." To put it more bluntly and more precisely, vulgarity was the main theme of West's writing. But it was also his medium. He wrote about emotional, moral, and spiritual coarseness, and, notwithstanding his considerable learning, style, and wit, he wrote about them coarsely.

WEST'S FIRST novel, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931), is a work of the cloacal modernist imagination, and is almost unendurably bad. Balso, a poet, comes upon the Trojan horse and enters it by way of its anus, which proves to be the business end of Western civilization. A tour guide appears, points out "a beautiful Doric prostate gland swollen with gladness," tells a dirty joke about Moses and the burning bush, and engages Balso in a burlesque debate that touches upon Picasso, William James, C.M. Doughty, George Moore, Alphonse Daudet, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Henri Bergson, and Paul Cézanne. There is plenty more of this sort of thing; even at 50 pages, *Balso Snell* is far too long.

A Cool Million (1934) is about twice that length, and no less excruciating. Debunking what he sees as the insidiously vulgar American myth of success (as typified by the tales of Horatio Alger), West makes it out to be the sinister work of homegrown fascists. The small-town innocent Lemuel Pitkin heads off to New York City to make his fortune. While chasing his star, Lemuel proceeds to lose his teeth, an eye, a thumb, a leg, his scalp, and finally his life when he is gunned down by a nefarious fat man who works for both Wall Street and Moscow. Norman Mailer once observed that the novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote like the smartest fifteen-year-old ever; in this antically trifling novel, West writes like a fourteen-year-old, and neither writer nor reader knows, to quote Mae West, just whom is fooling whom.

Miss Lonelyhearts (1933) is a much better book, although it too suffers from an irony that cannot stop itself. The title character, a young

ALGIS VALIUNAS, *who reviewed John Muir's* Nature Writings *last month, has contributed literary and cultural criticism to a number of periodicals.*

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New York newspaperman who writes an advice column, finds himself overwhelmed by the pain of the people who appeal to him: a girl born without a nose, a boy whose deaf-and-dumb sister has been molested, a woman afraid that her eighth pregnancy will kill her. The compassion Miss Lonelyhearts feels for these broken in spirit is ardent but impotent. He has nothing to give but platitudes of self-help and chipper uplift.

Walking the streets, Miss Lonelyhearts perceives that what modernity offers the suffering is not genuine hope but vulgar distraction. At last, alone in bed, burning with fever, he looks at the crucifix on his wall, and God's mind and heart become transparent to him. But just at that moment a cripple whose wife Miss Lonelyhearts has slept with comes looking for him. Miss Lonelyhearts, who does not see the gun the man is concealing, believes that this is the occasion for him to perform a miracle. "He would embrace the cripple and the cripple would be made whole again, even as he, a spiritual cripple, had been made whole." The cripple runs from him; he catches the cripple; the gun goes off; Miss Lonelyhearts goes down.

In this book West knows the world he writes of, and he portrays its moral grotesquerie with wicked panache. That, however, is faint praise. Miss Lonelyhearts's religious experience, which is not complete without his meaningless death, is reminiscent of the deathbed vision that Flaubert's dimwitted Félicité enjoys in the story *Un coeur simple* ("A Simple Heart"): she sees hovering above her like the Holy Spirit her beloved stuffed parrot. But West is grimmer than Flaubert; not only does he deny Miss Lonelyhearts a true conversion, he does not even let him get away with the consolation of a false one. The deadpan, wised-up tone invests the ending with a contemptuous despair, as the fantastic hopes of an addled piety turn out to be no match for the brute facts of the dead world. In sum, *Miss Lonelyhearts* is like a very long and very good sick joke, told by a well-dressed man in a voice of unusual refinement.

The Day of the Locust (1939) is widely regarded as the best novel ever written about Hollywood, and it probably is, although one wishes one could think of a better. West captures the celebrated, by now clichéd, unreality that pervades a place where insurance salesmen dress like mountaineers and switchboard operators like tennis players; a house is not just a home but "a miniature Rhine castle with tarpaper turrets pierced for archers"; a silent movie queen turned madam likes to talk to her clients about Gertrude Stein and Juan Gris; and an eight-year-old child actor sings the blues with writhing buttocks and "a top-heavy load of sexual pain" in his voice.

West's eye for the physically and spiritually misshapen finds plenty to keep itself occupied in this book. His protagonist, Tod Hackett, a Yale-educated painter who works as a set and costume designer, becomes fascinated by the grim-visaged people who "had come to California to die." Although Tod regards Goya and Daumier as his artistic masters, his preoccupations, and West's, make one think above all of George Grosz in the waning days of Weimar Germany: in the teeming malignity of Grosz's crowds, one sees the model for the mob that, in the novel's apocalyptic last chapter, runs amok at a movie premiere and mauls a man who has stomped on the singing child actor.

West's description of what it is like to be engulfed by that mob is harrowingly brilliant, but his

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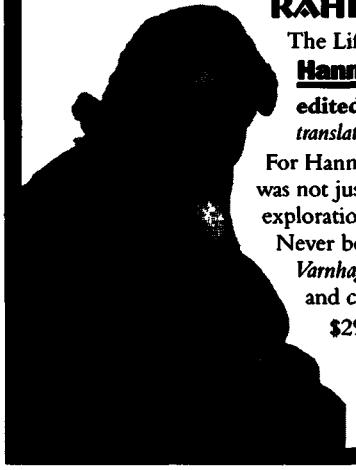

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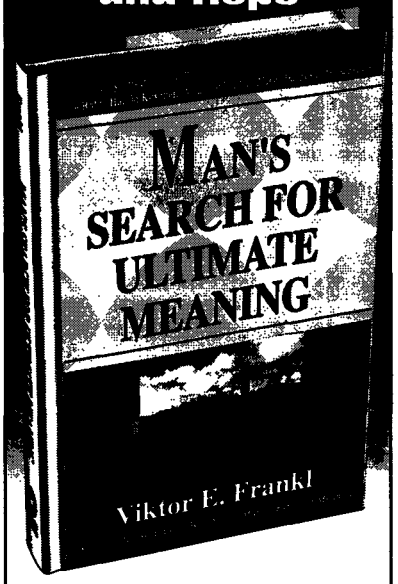

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Viktor E. Frankl

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account of what animates it is notably wanting. As he sketches the worshipers at some preposterous Hollywood church, Tod reflects that those who had come to California to die "had it in them to destroy civilization." But what of those who provided them with their fantasies?

Almost entirely absent from *The Day of the Locust* are the screenwriters, directors, producers, and studio heads who in their own, civilized way were the ones doing the real destroying. West knew *that* world, or certain precincts of it anyway, well enough to write about it tellingly. Perhaps out of cowardice, he missed a great opportunity.

WITH THE benefit of hindsight, one also sees something factitious about West's scenario of pandemonium. In his caricatures of bourgeois proto-Nazis, George Grosz was depicting people who would in fact destroy civilization; West only thought he was doing the same thing. His protagonist, thinking about the canvas he is at work on, "The Burning of Los Angeles," has his doubts about whether the people he is painting really are mad or desperate enough to burn down a city; but then he thinks some more, and concludes that there will, indeed, be civil war, beginning in L.A. Although he tells himself his work will be judged not as prophecy but as painting, nevertheless he relishes "the role of Jeremiah."

West, too, relished that role, and thought that his art divined the dire fate of America. Fortunately for America, it did not. Even in West's best work, the heart of the matter eluded him, and he contented himself with an essentially vulgar understanding of vulgarity. A prophet who got it wrong, he enjoys too much honor in his own country.

Pedagogue Power

United Mind Workers
by Charles Taylor Kerchner, Julia E. Koppich, and Joseph G. Weeres
Jossey-Bass. 320 pp. $29.95

The Teacher Unions
by Myron Lieberman
Free Press. 320 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Chester E. Finn, Jr.

AMERICA'S TWO national teachers' unions are in trouble these days, even by their own reckoning. Last January, consultants hired by the huge National Education Association (NEA) to appraise the union's "external communications efforts" delivered a scathing report. The public not only sees the NEA as "a monolithic union that looks out for number one at everyone else's—including kids'—expense," the consultants concluded, but also regards it as "the greatest obstacle to needed education reform," with "nothing new or positive to offer."

As for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the smaller and historically more moderate of the two unions, its new president, Sandra Feldman, has been sounding defensive since succeeding the late Albert Shanker several months ago. While proclaiming the AFT a still-dauntless foe of vouchers, non-union charter schools, and the like, she has also rushed to present it as a friend of "teacher quality" and higher academic standards.

The problems facing the NEA and the AFT go well beyond public relations, however. Independent "professional" organizations for

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teachers have sprung up in a half-dozen states, challenging the national unions' hegemony. Several state legislatures have nipped the power of teachers' unions to shape school policy. Lawsuits are challenging their use of members' dues for political purposes. And the very reforms the unions so bitterly oppose are making headway all across the country.

It would be a major blunder, of course, to count out the teachers' unions, or even to consider them seriously wounded. With a combined membership of more than three million—including over 90 percent of all U.S. teachers—they still have vast financial war chests and immense political clout, which they employ to great effect in defending the educational status quo. With reform in the air, however, teachers' unions may change as well. Two timely and valuable new books try to show us how.

United Mind Workers, by three professors at the Claremont Graduate School in California, is the more optimistic volume. As its clever title suggests, the book looks ahead with futuristic fervor to a radically new kind of teachers' union, one that would be more suited to our dawning "knowledge society" and to the most promising strategies for education reform. Under the contracts negotiated by this union of tomorrow, personnel decisions would be made in individual schools, rather than at the district level; hiring standards would be high; salaries would be tied to knowledgeability and performance; and a culture of professionalism would be the norm.

Unions built upon these policies, the authors argue, would readily embrace educational choice, extending even to privatized public schools. Teachers would jump at the chance to escape from the deadening influence of central-office bureaucrats and "to congregate in schools where [teachers] favor the type and style of education being offered." And unions would at last have a way "to avoid the trap of equating good with public [employment] and evil with private employment."

All this makes for a laudable vision, to be sure, but it is also an exceedingly naive one in the absence of a plan for how to get from here to there. As even a casual observer of the NEA and the AFT must know, the idea that everything public is good and everything private is bad is not somehow incidental to them; it is their creed. It ensures their opposition not only to any meaningful program of school choice but also to reforms, like those proposed in this book, that strike at the security enjoyed by their members as tenured public employees. Asking the teachers' unions to think otherwise is like asking the military to give up the notion of war.

By contrast, Myron Lieberman entertains no illusions about the future of teachers' unions. An education researcher associated with Bowling Green State University in Ohio, he has 40 years of direct experience on both sides of the labor bargaining table, having served as a consultant to the NEA and the AFT and as a contract negotiator for various school boards. Lieberman knows teachers' unions as well as anyone, and views them with the cynical eye of a onetime insider. He does not, to say the least, expect them simply to wither away or to undergo a spontaneous conversion into something so benign as an organization of "mind workers."

In *The Teacher Unions*, subtitled "How the NEA and the AFT Sabotage Reform and Hold Parents, Students, Teachers, and Taxpayers Hostage to Bureaucracy," Lieberman offers up a phenomenal trove of facts and anecdotes, exhaustively

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describing how the teachers' unions work and what their priorities are. His judgments are harsh, even sharp-elbowed. Knowing, for instance, how savvy and relentless the unions are about maintaining their privileges, he dismisses as fools those reformers who have tried to work with them—a group that has included me on occasion.

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Lieberman is especially fearful that the NEA and the AFT will merge, an increasingly likely possibility in light of the elaborate mating dance that has gone on between them over the past several years. Such a union monopoly, he argues, would pose a still more formidable threat to needed reforms. One can imagine, for example, a nationwide protest strike by the new behemoth if charter-school laws should go too far in exempting some teachers from certification rules and uniform pay scales.

AS FOR getting beyond our current impasse, Lieberman pins his hopes on the discontents of teachers themselves. Not only have independent teachers' groups formed in a few states, but several NEA and AFT locals have withdrawn from their national organizations. With surveys showing that 20 to 30 percent of members are unhappy with the national unions, Lieberman believes that more teachers will form "local-only" alternatives. Charging far less in dues, these groups would handle their members' bread-and-butter collective-bargaining needs without getting entangled in state and national politics and in the various leftish crusades of the AFT and especially the NEA. The "mere existence" of such organizations, Lieberman predicts, would "conservatize" the national unions.

Is this a pie-in-the-sky scenario too? Perhaps. But dissatisfaction in the teaching ranks can only grow as public criticism of the NEA and the AFT intensifies in the years ahead. As Lieberman perceptively concludes, the most encouraging recent development is that the unions themselves "have become a political issue." Thanks in large part to the campaign waged by the Republicans in the 1996 election, candidates and public officials are now examining union campaign contributions, finances, and government subsidies as never before. Such scrutiny does not mean that the teachers' unions will be "more supportive of educational reform," acknowledges Lieberman, "but they will be less able to prevent it."

So modest a shift may not sound like much to hope for, but it would represent real progress all the same. Much as we might prefer the pro-reform unions that the authors of *United Mind Workers* dream of, we would be considerably better off than we are today if we simply had unions that did less harm.

All That Jazz

Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life
by Laurence Bergreen
Broadway Books. 564 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
David Ostwald

IN ONE way or another, most of the major biographies of Louis Armstrong have approached the story of this protean genius from a musical perspective. Laurence Bergreen's new book represents a different take: that of an observer of popular culture and of the making of individual character. The word "extravagant" in the subtitle has been chosen with care: for Bergreen, the revolutionary quality of Armstrong's musical art is best understood in the context of his boundlessly appetitive approach to all of life.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG was born in New Orleans in 1901. As Bergreen shows, that city, which itself embodied extravagance in every sense, bubbled with diverse peoples and diverse cultural influences, including music of both European and African origin. Ensembles of all

DAVID OSTWALD, *a new contributor, practices law in New York and is the leader of the Gully Low Jazz Band.*

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types played in parks, at funerals, in parades, and in the scores of nightclubs known as honky-tonks that thrived in the Battlefield, young Armstrong's poverty-stricken neighborhood. As a seven-year-old, the child scuffled for pennies to help support his mother and younger sister by singing on street corners and selling newspapers and brick dust.

Then fate brought him to a Jewish family by the name of Karnofsky, who employed and loved him and taught him that blacks were not alone among the world's outcasts. Bergreen quotes from an autobiographical manuscript: "I was only seven years old, but I could see the *ungodly* treatment that the white folks were handing the poor Jewish family whom I worked for."

The Karnofskys encouraged young Louis musically, loaning him the money to buy his first cornet. Before long, he was leading the band at the Colored Waif's Home, where he had been sent as punishment for firing a gun in the air on New Year's Eve, 1912. Inspired by the music he heard around him, as well as by the records of Caruso and the Irish tenor John McCormack, the teenaged Armstrong soon found work in a variety of musical settings before audiences rich and poor, black and white.

Armstrong left New Orleans in 1922 to join his mentor and idol, Joe "King" Oliver in Chicago, where he rapidly transformed himself from a provincial trumpet prodigy into a riveting entertainer. His model was the black dancer and comedian Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, who had achieved broad appeal without resorting to the abasing self-mockeries of minstrelsy. As Bergreen writes:

> Within weeks of his arrival in Chicago, Louis set his sights on becoming more than a jazz musician; he wanted to be an all-around performer who could play, sing, dance, joke, and beguile audiences into a trancelike state. Bojangles showed him how to be a star.

In 1925, after a brief stint in New York, Armstrong returned to Chicago. There, in addition to wowing live audiences with his musical wizardry and his dazzling persona, he created the jazz canon in recorded form. His "Hot Five" and "Hot Seven" recordings introduced to the world at large Armstrong's boundary-bursting concepts of rhythm, harmony, and melody. In short order, shady managers were fighting over rights: one dispute led Armstrong and his band to flee for their lives to the South, hardly a comfortable refuge for black jazz musicians in 1931.

Life on the run also took Armstrong to Western Europe and Scandinavia, where he thrilled new audiences. Upon his return to America in 1935, he found the lifelong managerial security he needed in the person of Joe Glaser—according to Bergreen, an underling of Al Capone—who arranged recordings, radio and film appearances, hundreds of performances across the country for Armstrong's big band, and the first of two published autobiographies.

With the demise of the big-band format in the late 1940's, Armstrong returned to his small-band roots and entered a new phase of international acclaim. By 1954, he had appeared on the cover of *Time*, published his second autobiography, and toured Europe (again), Australia, and Japan. Although his celebrity had begun to overtake appreciation of his music, that music was assuming a new maturity; in the 1950's he made some of his greatest recordings, teaming up with extraordinary artists like the pianist Oscar Peterson and the singer Ella Fitzgerald, and exploring the works of composers from W.C. Handy to

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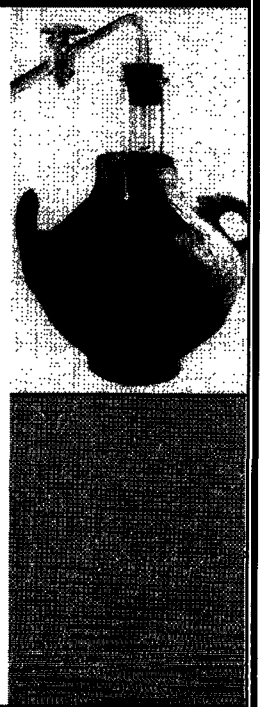

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George Gershwin to Cole Porter.

The 1960's brought no break in Armstrong's schedule. As America's international "ambassador of good will," he toured twenty countries, appeared frequently on television variety shows, and knocked the Beatles off the charts with "Hello, Dolly!" When he died in 1971, 25,000 admirers filed by his casket.

BERGREEN SEES an essential continuity between Armstrong's disregard for musical bounds and his ability to bridge or transcend social, economic, and racial ones. He credits the Karnofskys with engendering this capacity in a child formed by the bitter legacy of slavery. It was they who, by opening the young boy's mind, helped him understand how he could absorb and express varied influences, perform unself-consciously before a diverse public, survive in a bigoted world, and even conquer it.

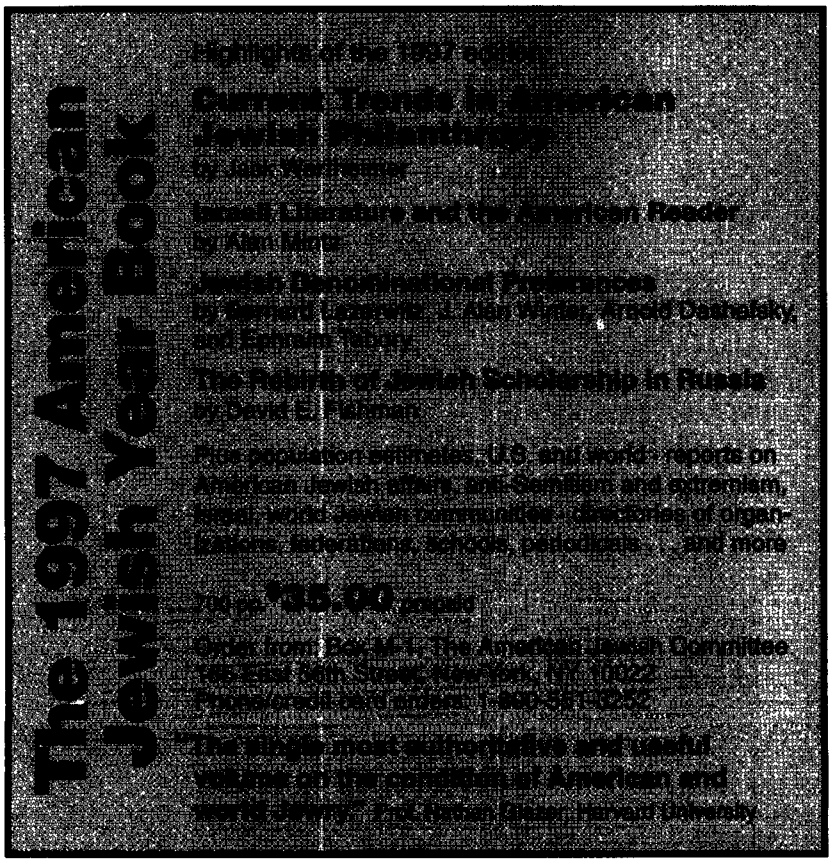
In the 1920's, hundreds of thousands of whites were mesmerized into a dawning racial awareness by Armstrong's Broadway performance and recording of "Broadway Black and Blue," with the lyrics: "I'm white inside, but that don't help my case/ 'cause I can't hide what is in my face." His loose, joking, manly style accomplished what no amount of straightforward instruction could hope to implant. In 1931, when a white radio announcer refused to introduce "that nigger man" on the air, Armstrong amiably grabbed the microphone and introduced himself. When white supremacists detonated an explosive device during a 1957 performance before a racially mixed (though separately seated) audience, Armstrong cracked, "that's all right, folks, it's just the phone," and went on with the show.

No Uncle Tom, Armstrong successfully fought bigotry in his own way by surreptitiously injecting himself into the cultural mainstream. But he was also capable of speaking out when necessary. Faced, in Bergreen's words, with the "cruel irony of an American ambassador who could not use a rest-room in his own land," he publicly denounced President Eisenhower for standing idle as Orval Faubus, the governor of Arkansas, refused to integrate Little Rock's public schools. Throughout the 50's he declined to perform in his home state of Louisiana so long as it continued to prohibit integrated bands. "They treat me better all over the world than they do in my own hometown," he said. "Ain't that stupid? Jazz was born there and I remember when it wasn't no crime for cats of any color to get together and blow."

Armstrong's disdain for boundaries defined his personal and sexual style as well. Illustrating his theme of extravagance, Bergreen goes into much greater detail than any previous biographer to describe the trumpeter's insatiable skirt-chasing throughout all four of his marriages, as well as his lifelong marijuana habit. He even surmises that the recordings made by Armstrong when stoned surpass those made when he was sober—as it happens, an untenable assertion.

IN ITS own terms, *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life* is an engaging book, though unfortunately Bergreen races through the last quarter-century, half of Armstrong's professional life, in his final 67 pages, thereby shortchanging not only the majesty of Armstrong's art during this period but also the full, worshipful extent of his worldwide popularity. The absence of any sort of epilogue, especially given the eloquence of Bergreen's opening chapter—one of the best six-page summaries of Armstrong ever written—is startling.

But the book is also beset with problems. For one thing, both the main text and the endnotes are riddled with factual errors, appalling in



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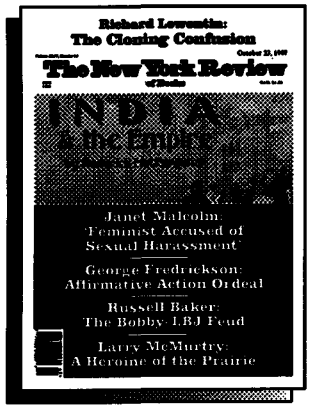

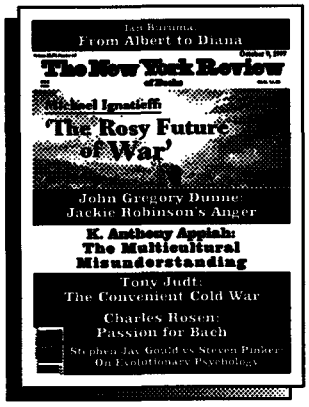

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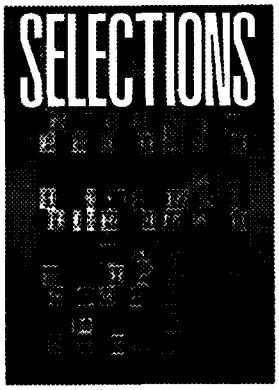

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view of the army of research assistants whom Bergreen thanks and his generally impressive ability to synthesize material from disparate sources. Numerous dates are simply wrong: Bergreen has Armstrong playing in a band a year before he joined it; leaving Chicago for New York a year after he actually did; singing the verse to "Basin Street Blues" thirteen years before it was written; and meeting the woman who would become his first wife months after they had married. He has Lil Hardin, Armstrong's second wife, writing a song Fats Waller composed, and he misspells the lyricist Andy Razaf's name. According to Bergreen, "there was, astonishingly, no music" at Armstrong's funeral; this would come as news to Al Hibbler and Peggy Lee, both of whom sang at the ceremonies. There is much, much more of this sort of thing.

More serious problems arise from Bergreen's tendency to confuse stories and thus reach inaccurate conclusions. In one instance, he has Armstrong calling his longtime manager Joe Glaser—whom he loved deeply and never deprecated, publicly or privately—"a crude sonofabitch." But the source to whom Bergreen refers actually quoted Armstrong as directing that epithet not at Glaser but at the bouncer of a New Orleans honky-tonk. (To compound the sin, Bergreen gets the quotation right earlier in the book.)

Elsewhere, Bergreen asserts that the record producer George Avakian "tried to banish" the singer Velma Middleton from the 1954 album *Armstrong Plays W.C. Handy*, even though, in the liner notes to a CD reissue of that album, Avakian himself cites his sharp *rejoinder* to the jazz writer who in fact questioned her inclusion. Fourteen pages later, it becomes evident that Bergreen has confused Avakian with another George—Wein—who tried to banish Middleton from the 1957 Newport Jazz Festival.

FINALLY, AND most damagingly, Bergreen is simply out of his element when it comes to assessing Armstrong's music. His characterization of scat (the use of sounds, not words) as "funny babbling" shows a misunderstanding of the joy and pathos Armstrong consistently conveyed in his singing. His description of the smaller and mellower cornet which Armstrong played early on as "larger" and "bolder" than the trumpet reveals a truly inexcusable ignorance of his subject's instrument.

"He lacked the technique to play on the [chord] changes," Bergreen writes; but Armstrong invented playing on the changes. Again: "Miles Davis and John Coltrane were taking jazz to a level of sophistication that Louis couldn't hope to match"; but Miles Davis himself said, accurately, that "You know you can't play anything on the horn Louis hasn't already played—I mean modern." By 1947, Bergreen asserts, Armstrong "had nowhere else to go but musically back in time"; by 1970, some of the "leading lights of jazz . . . [had] evolved far beyond him." In fact, Armstrong was not only unmatched in musical sophistication, early *and* late, he was the bedrock of jazz music altogether. "No him, no me," quipped Dizzy Gillespie. "He is the beginning and end of music in America," added Bing Crosby.

In the aggregate, these mistakes of fact and interpretation add up to a serious loss of credibility. That is a pity, since in so many other ways Bergreen captures the essence of this noble avatar with passion, humor, and deep personal understanding. As popular biography, *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life* makes the grade. But add salt.

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